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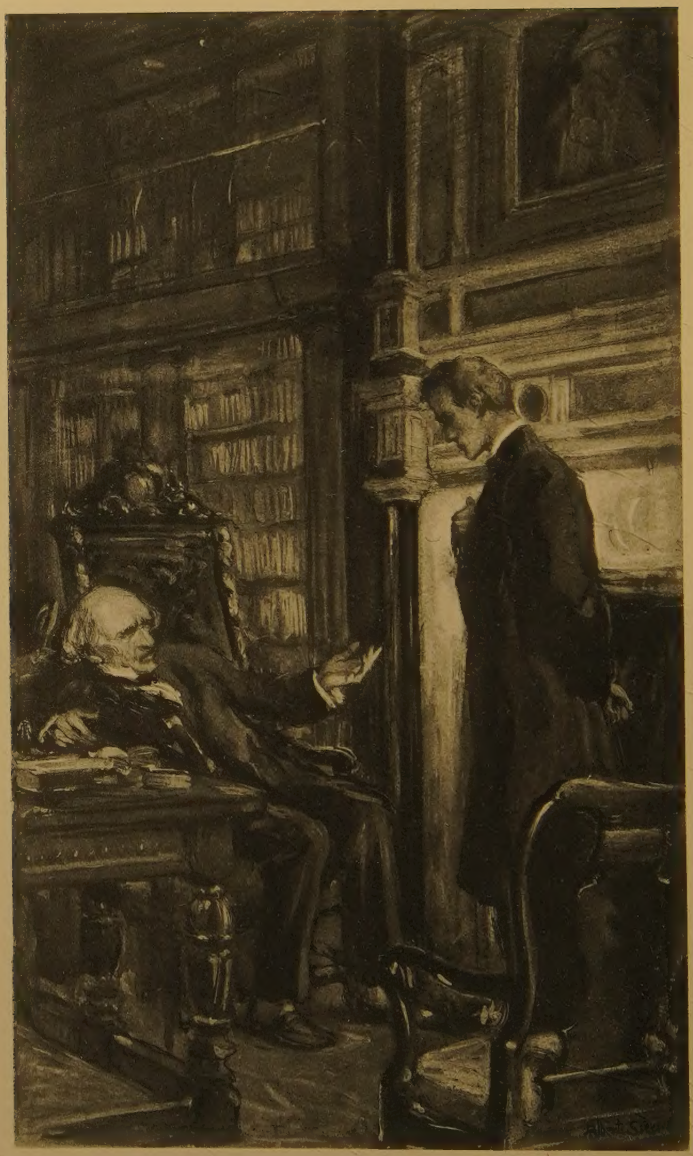

*Robert Elsmere and the Squire*

# THE WRITINGS OF

# MRS HUMPHRY WARD

## ROBERT ELSMERE

### VOLUME II

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
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1911

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From an original drawing by Albert Sterner. 'The interview opened as awkwardly as it was possible, and with their former conversation on the same spot fresh in their minds both men spent a sufficiently difficult ten minutes. The squire was asking himself, indeed, impatiently, all the time, whether he could possibly be forced in the future to put up with such an experience again, and Robert found his host, if less sarcastic than before, certainly as impenetrable as ever.' (Page 5.)

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*All of the illustrations in this volume are photogravures, and except where otherwise stated are from photographs taken especially for this Edition.*

# BOOK III

## THE SQUIRE (*continued*)

# ROBERT ELSMERE

## CHAPTER XXII

As may be imagined, the *Churton Advertiser* did not find its way to Murewell. It was certainly no pressure of social disapproval that made the squire go down to Mile End in that winter's dawn. The county might talk, or the local press might harangue, till Doomsday, and Mr. Wendover would either know nothing or care less.

Still his interview with Meyrick in the park after his return from a week in town, whither he had gone to see some old Berlin friends, had been a shock to him. A man may play the intelligent recluse, may refuse to fit his life to his neighbours' notions as much as you please, and still find death, especially death for which he has some responsibility, as disturbing a fact as the rest of us.

He went home in much irritable discomfort. It seemed to him probably that fortune need not have been so eager to put him in the wrong. To relieve his mind he sent for Henslowe, and in an interview, the memory of which sent a shiver through the agent to the end of his days, he let it be seen that though it did not for the moment suit him to dismiss the man who had brought this upon him, that man's reign in any true sense was over.

But afterwards the squire was still restless. What was astir in him was not so much pity or remorse as

certain instincts of race which still survived under the strange superstructure of manners he had built upon them. It may be the part of a gentleman and a scholar to let the agent whom you have interposed between yourself and a boorish peasantry have a free hand; but, after all, the estate is yours, and to expose the rector of the parish to all sorts of avoidable risks in the pursuit of his official duty by reason of the gratuitous filth of your property, is an act of doubtful breeding. The squire in his most rough-and-tumble days at Berlin had always felt himself the grandee as well as the student. He abhorred sentimentalism, but neither did he choose to cut an unseemly figure in his own eyes.

After a night, therefore, less tranquil or less meditative than usual, he rose early and sallied forth at one of those unusual hours he generally chose for walking. The thing must be put right somehow, and at once, with as little waste of time and energy as possible, and Henslowe had shown himself not to be trusted; so telling a servant to follow him, the squire had made his way with difficulty to a place he had not seen for years.

Then had followed the unexpected and unwelcome apparition of the rector. The squire did not want to be impressed by the young man, did not want to make friends with him. No doubt his devotion had served his own purposes. Still Mr. Wendover was one of the subtlest living judges of character when he pleased, and his enforced progress through these hovels with Elsmere had not exactly softened him, but had filled him with a curious contempt for his own hastiness of judgement.

'History would be inexplicable after all without the

honest fanatic,' he said to himself on the way home. 'I suppose I had forgotten it. There is nothing like a dread of being bored for blunting your psychological instinct.'

In the course of the day he sent off a letter to the rector intimating in the very briefest, driest way that the cottages should be rebuilt on a different site as soon as possible, and enclosing a liberal contribution towards the expenses incurred in fighting the epidemic. When the letter was gone he drew his books towards him with a sound which was partly disgust, partly relief. This annoying business had wretchedly interrupted him, and his concessions left him mainly conscious of a strong nervous distaste for the idea of any fresh interview with young Elsmere. He had got his money and his apology; let him be content.

However, next morning after breakfast Mr. Wendover once more saw his study-door open to admit the tall figure of the rector. The note and cheque had reached Robert late the night before, and, true to his new-born determination to make the best of the squire, he had caught up his wideawake at the first opportunity and walked off to the Hall to acknowledge the gift in person. The interview opened as awkwardly as it was possible, and with their former conversation on the same spot fresh in their minds both men spent a sufficiently difficult ten minutes. The squire was asking himself, indeed, impatiently, all the time, whether he could possibly be forced in the future to put up with such an experience again, and Robert found his host, if less sarcastic than before, certainly as impenetrable as ever.

At last, however, the Mile End matter was exhausted, and then Robert, as good luck would have it, turned his longing eyes on the squire's books, especially on the latest volumes of a magnificent German 'Weltgeschichte' lying near his elbow, which he had coveted for months without being able to conquer his conscience sufficiently to become the possessor of it. He took it up with an exclamation of delight, and a quiet critical remark that exactly hit the value and scope of the book. The squire's eyebrows went up, and the corners of his mouth slackened visibly. Half an hour later the two men, to the amazement of Mrs. Darcy, who was watching them from the drawing-room window, walked back to the park gates together, and what Robert's nobility and beauty of character would never have won him, though he had worn himself to death in the service of the poor and the tormented under the squire's eyes, a chance coincidence of intellectual interest had won him almost in a moment.

The squire walked back to the house under a threatening sky, his mackintosh cloak wrapped about him, his arms folded, his mind full of an unwonted excitement.

The sentiment of long-past days — days in Berlin, in Paris, where conversations such as that he had just passed through were the daily relief and reward of labour — was stirring in him. Occasionally he had endeavoured to import the materials for them from the Continent, from London. But as a matter of fact it was years since he had had any such talk as this with an Englishman on English ground, and he suddenly

realised that he had been unwholesomely solitary, and that for the scholar there is no nerve stimulus like that of an occasional interchange of ideas with some one acquainted with his *Fach.*

'Who would ever have thought of discovering instincts and aptitudes of such a kind in this long-legged optimist?' The squire shrugged his shoulders as he thought of the attempt involved in such a personality to combine both worlds, the world of action and the world of thought. Absurd! Of course, ultimately one or other must go to the wall.

Meanwhile, what a ludicrous waste of time and opportunity that he and this man should have been at cross-purposes like this! 'Why the deuce could n't he have given some rational account of himself to begin with!' thought the squire irritably, forgetting, of course, who it was that had wholly denied him the opportunity. 'And then the sending back of those books: what a piece of idiocy!'

Granted an historical taste in this young parson, it was a curious chance, Mr. Wendover reflected, that in his choice of a subject he should just have fallen on the period of the later empire — of the passage from the old world to the new, where the squire was a master. The squire fell to thinking of the kind of knowledge implied in his remarks, of the stage he seemed to have reached, and then to cogitating as to the books he must be now in want of. He went back to his library, ran over the shelves, picking out volumes here and there with an unwonted glow and interest all the while. He sent for a case, and made a youth who sometimes acted as his secretary pack them. And still

as he went back to his own work new names would occur to him, and full of the scholar's avaricious sense of the shortness of time, he would shake his head and frown over the three months which young Elsmere had already passed, grappling with problems like Teutonic Arianism, the spread of Monasticism in Gaul, and Heaven knows what besides, half a mile from the man and the library which could have supplied him with the best help to be got in England, unbenefited by either! Mile End was obliterated, and the annoyance of the morning forgotten.

The next day was Sunday, a wet January Sunday, raw and sleety, the frost breaking up on all sides and flooding the roads with mire.

Robert, rising in his place to begin morning service, and wondering to see the congregation so good on such a day, was suddenly startled, as his eye travelled mechanically over to the Hall pew, usually tenanted by Mrs. Darcy in solitary state, to see the characteristic figure of the squire. His amazement was so great that he almost stumbled in the exhortation, and his feeling was evidently shared by the congregation, which throughout the service showed a restlessness, an excited tendency to peer round corners and pillars, that was not favourable to devotion.

'Has he come to spy out the land?' the rector thought to himself, and could not help a momentary tremor at the idea of preaching before so formidable an auditor. Then he pulled himself together by a great effort, and fixing his eyes on a shock-headed urchin halfway down the church, read the service to him. Catherine meanwhile in her seat on the northern side

of the nave, her soul lulled in Sunday peace, knew nothing of Mr. Wendover's appearance.

Robert preached on the first sermon of Jesus, on the first appearance of the young Master in the synagogue at Nazareth: —

'*This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears!*'

The sermon dwelt on the Messianic aspect of Christ's mission, on the mystery and poetry of that long national expectation, on the pathos of Jewish disillusion, on the sureness and beauty of Christian insight as faith gradually transferred trait after trait of the Messiah of prophecy to the Christ of Nazareth. At first there was a certain amount of hesitation, a slight wavering hither and thither — a difficult choice of words — and then the soul freed itself from man, and the preacher forgot all but his Master and his people.

At the door as he came out stood Mr. Wendover, and Catherine, slightly flushed and much puzzled for conversation, beside him. The Hall carriage was drawn close up to the door, and Mrs. Darcy, evidently much excited, had her small head out of the window, and was showering a number of flighty inquiries and suggestions on her brother, to which he paid no more heed than to the patter of the rain.

When Robert appeared the squire addressed him ceremoniously —

'With your leave, Mr. Elsmere, I will walk with you to the rectory.' Then, in another voice, 'Go home, Lætitia, and don't send anything or anybody.'

He made a signal to the coachman, and the carriage started, Mrs. Darcy's protesting head remaining out of window as long as anything could be seen of the group

at the church door. The odd little creature had paid one or two hurried and recent visits to Catherine during the quarrel, visits so filled, however, with vague railing against her brother and with a queer incoherent melancholy, that Catherine felt them extremely uncomfortable, and took care not to invite them. Clearly Mrs. Darcy was mortally afraid of 'Roger,' and yet ashamed of being afraid. Catherine could see that all the poor thing's foolish whims and affectations were trampled on; that she suffered, rebelled, found herself no more able to affect Mr. Wendover than if she had been a fly buzzing round him, and became all the more foolish and whimsical in consequence.

The squire and the Elsmeres crossed the common to the rectory, followed at a discreet interval by groups of villagers curious to get a look at the squire. Robert was conscious of a good deal of embarrassment, but did his best to hide it. Catherine felt all through as if the skies had fallen. The squire alone was at his ease, or as much at his ease as he ever was. He commented on the congregation, even condescended to say something of the singing, and passed over the staring of the choristers with a magnanimity of silence which did him credit.

They reached the rectory door, and it was evidently the squire's purpose to come in, so Robert invited him in. Catherine threw open her little drawing-room door, and then was seized with shyness as the squire passed in, and she saw over his shoulder her baby, lying kicking and crowing on the hearthrug, in anticipation of her arrival, the nurse watching it. The squire in his great cloak stopped, and looked down at the baby as

if it had been some curious kind of reptile. The nurse blushed, curtseyed, and caught up the gurgling creature in a twinkling.

Robert made a laughing remark on the tyranny and ubiquity of babies. The squire smiled grimly. He supposed it was necessary that the human race should be carried on. Catherine meanwhile slipped out and ordered another place to be laid at the dinner-table, devoutly hoping that it might not be used.

It was used. The squire stayed till it was necessary to invite him, then accepted the invitation, and Catherine found herself dispensing boiled mutton to him, while Robert supplied him with some very modest claret, the sort of wine which a man who drinks none thinks it necessary to have in the house, and watched the nervousness of their little parlour-maid with a fellow-feeling which made it difficult for him during the early part of the meal to keep a perfectly straight countenance. After a while, however, both he and Catherine were ready to admit that the squire was making himself agreeable. He talked of Paris, of a conversation he had had with M. Renan, whose name luckily was quite unknown to Catherine, as to the state of things in the French Chamber.

'A set of chemists and quill-drivers,' he said contemptuously; 'but as Renan remarked to me, there is one thing to be said for a government of that sort, "Ils ne font pas la guerre." And so long as they don't run France into adventures, and a man can keep a roof over his head and a sou in his pocket, the men of letters at any rate can rub along. The really interesting thing in France just now is not French politics — Heaven

save the mark! — but French scholarship. There never was so little original genius going in Paris, and there never was so much good work being done.'

Robert thought the point of view eminently characteristic.

'Catholicism, I suppose,' he said, 'as a force to be reckoned with, is dwindling more and more?'

'Absolutely dead,' said the squire emphatically, 'as an *intellectual* force. They have n't got a writer, scarcely a preacher. Not one decent book has been produced on that side for years.'

'And the Protestants, too,' said Robert, 'have lost all their best men of late'; and he mentioned one or two well-known French Protestant names.

'Oh, as to French Protestantism' — and the squire's shrug was superb — 'Teutonic Protestantism is in the order of things, so to speak, but *Latin* Protestantism! There is no more sterile hybrid in the world!'

Then, becoming suddenly aware that he might have said something inconsistent with his company, the squire stopped abruptly. Robert, catching Catherine's quick compression of the lips, was grateful to him, and the conversation moved on in another direction.

Yes, certainly, all things considered, Mr. Wendover made himself agreeable. He ate his boiled mutton and drank his *ordinaire* like a man, and when the meal was over, and he and Robert had withdrawn into the study, he gave an emphatic word of praise to the coffee which Catherine's housewifely care sent after them, and accepting a cigar, he sank into the armchair by the fire and spread a bony hand to the blaze, as if he had been at home in that particular corner for months. Robert,

sitting opposite to him, and watching his guest's eyes travel round the room, with its medicine-shelves, its rods and nets, and preparations of uncanny beasts, its parish litter, and its teeming bookcases, felt that the Mile End matter was turning out oddly indeed.

'I have packed you a case of books, Mr. Elsmere,' said the squire, after a puff or two at his cigar. 'How have you got on without that collection of Councils?'

He smiled a little awkwardly. It was one of the books Robert had sent back. Robert flushed. He did not want the squire to regard him as wholly dependent on Murewell.

'I bought it,' he said, rather shortly. 'I have ruined myself in books lately, and the London Library too supplies me really wonderfully well.'

'Are these your books?' The squire got up to look at them. 'Hum, not at all bad for a beginning. I have sent you so and so,' and he named one or two costly folios that Robert had long pined for in vain.

The rector's eyes glistened.

'That was very good of you,' he said simply. 'They will be most welcome.'

'And now, how much *time*,' said the other, settling himself again to his cigar, his thin legs crossed over each other, and his great head sunk into his shoulders, 'how much time do you give to this work?'

'Generally the mornings — not always. A man with twelve hundred souls to look after, you know, Mr. Wendover,' said Elsmere, with a bright half-defiant accent, 'can't make grubbing among the Franks his main business.'

The squire said nothing, and smoked on. Robert

gathered that his companion thought his chances of doing anything worth mentioning very small.

'Oh no,' he said, following out his own thought with a shake of his curly hair; 'of course I shall never do very much. But if I don't, it won't be for want of knowing what the scholar's ideal is.' And he lifted his hand with a smile towards the squire's book on 'English Culture,' which stood in the bookcase just above him. The squire, following the gesture, smiled too. It was a faint, slight illumining, but it changed the face agreeably.

Robert began to ask questions about the book, about the pictures contained in it of foreign life and foreign universities. The squire consented to be drawn out, and presently was talking at his very best.

Racy stories of Mommsen or Von Ranke were followed by a description of an evening of mad carouse with Heine — a talk at Nohant with George Sand — scenes in the Duchesse de Broglie's salon — a contemptuous sketch of Guizot — a caustic sketch of Renan. Robert presently even laid aside his pipe, and stood in his favourite attitude, lounging against the mantelpiece, looking down, absorbed, on his visitor. All that intellectual passion which his struggle at Mile End had for the moment checked in him revived. Nay, after his weeks of exclusive contact with the most hideous forms of bodily ill, this interruption, these great names, this talk of great movements and great causes, had a special savour and relish. All the horizons of the mind expanded, the currents of the blood ran quicker.

Suddenly, however, he sprang up.

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Wendover, it is too bad to interrupt you — I have enjoyed it immensely — but the fact is I have only two minutes to get to Sunday School in!'

Mr. Wendover rose also, and resumed his ordinary manner.

'It is I who should apologise,' he said with stiff politeness, 'for having encroached in this way on your busy day, Mr. Elsmere.'

Robert helped him on with his coat, and then suddenly the squire turned to him.

'You were preaching this morning on one of the Isaiah quotations in St. Matthew. It would interest you, I imagine, to see a recent Jewish book on the subject of the prophecies quoted in the Gospels which reached me yesterday. There is nothing particularly new in it, but it looked to me well done.'

'Thank you,' said Robert, not, however, with any great heartiness, and the squire moved away. They parted at the gate, Robert running down the hill to the village as fast as his long legs could carry him.

'Sunday School — pshaw!' cried the squire, as he tramped homeward in the opposite direction.

Next morning a huge packing-case arrived from the Hall, and Robert could not forbear a little gloating over the treasures in it before he tore himself away to pay his morning visit to Mile End. There everything was improving; the poor Sharland child indeed had slipped away on the night after the squire's visit, but the other bad cases in the diphtheria ward were mending fast. John Allwood was gaining strength daily, and poor Mary Sharland was feebly struggling back to a

life which seemed hardly worth so much effort to keep. Robert felt, with a welcome sense of slackening strain, that the daily and hourly superintendence which he and Catherine had been giving to the place might lawfully be relaxed, that the nurses on the spot were now more than equal to their task, and after having made his round he raced home again in order to secure an hour with his books before luncheon.

The following day a note arrived, while they were at luncheon, in the squire's angular precise handwriting. It contained a request that, unless otherwise engaged, the rector would walk with Mr. Wendover that afternoon.

Robert flung it across to Catherine.

'Let me see,' he said, deliberating, 'have I any engagement I must keep?'

There was a sort of jealousy for his work within him contending with this new fascination of the squire's company. But, honestly, there was nothing in the way, and he went.

That walk was the first of many. The squire had no sooner convinced himself that young Elsmere's society did in reality provide him with a stimulus and recreation he had been too long without, than in his imperious wilful way he began to possess himself of it as much as possible. He never alluded to the trivial matters which had first separated and then united them. He worked the better, he thought the more clearly, for these talks and walks with Elsmere, and therefore these talks and walks became an object with him. They supplied a long-stifled want, the scholar's want of disciples, of some form of investment for all that

heaped-up capital of thought he had been accumulating during a lifetime.

As for Robert, he soon felt himself so much under the spell of the squire's strange and powerful personality that he was forced to make a fight for it, lest this new claim should encroach upon the old ones. He would walk when the squire liked, but three times out of four these walks must be parish rounds, interrupted by descents into cottages and chats in farmhouse parlours. The squire submitted. The neighbourhood began to wonder over the strange spectacle of Mr. Wendover waiting grimly in the winter dusk outside one of his own farmhouses while Elsmere was inside, or patrolling a bit of lane till Elsmere should have inquired after an invalid or beaten up a recruit for his confirmation class, dogged the while by stealthy children, with fingers in their mouths, who ran away in terror directly he turned.

Rumours of this new friendship spread. One day, on the bit of road between the Hall and the rectory, Lady Helen behind her ponies whirled past the two men, and her arch look at Elsmere said as plainly as words, 'Oh, you young wonder! what hook has served you with this leviathan?'

On another occasion, close to Churton, a man in a cassock and cloak came towards them. The squire put up his eye-glass.

'Humph!' he remarked; 'do you know this merry-andrew, Elsmere?'

It was Newcome. As they passed, Robert with slightly heightened colour gave him an affectionate nod and smile. Newcome's quick eye ran over the

companions, he responded stiffly, and his step grew more rapid. A week or two later Robert noticed with a little prick of remorse that he had seen nothing of Newcome for an age. If Newcome would not come to him, he must go to Mottringham. He planned an expedition, but something happened to prevent it.

And Catherine? Naturally this new and most unexpected relation of Robert's to the man who had begun by insulting him was of considerable importance to the wife. In the first place it broke up to some extent the exquisite *tête-à-tête* of their home life; it encroached often upon time that had always been hers; it filled Robert's mind more and more with matters in which she had no concern. All these things many wives might have resented. Catherine Elsmere resented none of them. It is probable, of course, that she had her natural moments of regret and comparison, when love said to itself a little sorely and hungrily, 'It is hard to be even a fraction less to him than I once was!' But if so, these moments never betrayed themselves in word or act. Her tender common sense, her sweet humility, made her recognise at once Robert's need of intellectual comradeship, isolated as he was in this remote rural district. She knew perfectly that a clergyman's life of perpetual giving-forth becomes morbid and unhealthy if there is not some corresponding taking-in.

If only it had not been Mr. Wendover! She marvelled over the fascination Robert found in his dry cynical talk. She wondered that a Christian pastor could ever forget Mr. Wendover's antecedents; that the man who had nursed those sick children could for-

give Mile End. All in all as they were to each other, she felt for the first time that she often understood her husband imperfectly. His mobility, his eagerness, were sometimes now a perplexity, even a pain to her.

It must not be imagined, however, that Robert let himself drift into this intellectual intimacy with one of the most distinguished of anti-Christian thinkers without reflecting on its possible consequences. The memory of that night of misery which 'The Idols of the Market-place' had inflicted on him was enough. He was no match in controversy for Mr. Wendover, and he did not mean to attempt it.

One morning the squire unexpectedly plunged into an account of a German monograph he had just received on the subject of the Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel. It was almost the first occasion on which he had touched what may strictly be called the *matériel* of orthodoxy in their discussions — at any rate directly. But the book was a striking one, and in the interest of it he had clearly forgotten his ground a little. Suddenly the man who was walking beside him interrupted him.

'I think we ought to understand one another, perhaps, Mr. Wendover,' Robert said, speaking under a quick sense of oppression, but with his usual dignity and bright courtesy. 'I know your opinions, of course, from your books; you know what mine, as an honest man, must be, from the position I hold. My conscience does not forbid me to discuss anything, only — I am no match for you on points of scholarship, and I should just like to say once for all, that to me, whatever else is true, the religion of Christ is true. I am a

Christian and a Christian minister. Therefore, whenever we come to discuss what may be called Christian evidence, I do it with reserves, which you would not have. I believe in an Incarnation, a Resurrection, a Revelation. If there are literary difficulties, I must want to smooth them away — you may want to make much of them. We come to the matter from different points of view. You will not quarrel with me for wanting to make it clear. It is n't as if we differed slightly. We differ fundamentally — is it not so?'

The squire was walking beside him with bent shoulders, the lower lip pushed forward, as was usual with him when he was considering a matter with close attention, but did not mean to communicate his thoughts.

After a pause he said, with a faint inscrutable smile, —

'Your reminder is perfectly just. Naturally we all have our reserves. Neither of us can be expected to stultify his own.'

And the talk went forward again, Robert joining in more buoyantly than ever, perhaps because he had achieved a necessary but disagreeable thing and got done with it.

In reality he had but been doing as the child does when it sets up its sand-barrier against the tide.

## CHAPTER XXIII

It was the beginning of April. The gorse was fast extending its golden empire over the commons. On the sunny slopes of the copses primroses were breaking through the hazel roots and beginning to gleam along the edges of the river. On the grass commons between Murewell and Mile End the birches rose like green clouds against the browns and purples of the still leafless oaks and beeches. The birds were twittering and building. Every day Robert was on the look-out for the swallows, or listening for the first notes of the nightingale amid the bare spring coverts.

But the spring was less perfectly delightful to him than it might have been, for Catherine was away. Mrs. Leyburn, who was to have come South to them in February, was attacked by bronchitis instead at Burwood and forbidden to move, even to a warmer climate. In March, Catherine, feeling restless and anxious about her mother, and thinking it hard that Agnes should have all the nursing and responsibility, tore herself from her man and her baby, and went North to Whindale for a fortnight, leaving Robert forlorn.

Now, however, she was in London, whither she had gone for a few days on her way home, to meet Rose and to shop. Robert's opinion was that all women, even Saint Elizabeths, have somewhere rooted in them an inordinate partiality for shopping; otherwise why should that operation take four or five mortal days?

Surely with a little energy, one might buy up the whole of London in twelve hours! However, Catherine lingered, and as her purchases were made, Robert crossly supposed it must be all Rose's fault. He believed that Rose spent a great deal too much on dress.

Catherine's letters, of course, were full of her sister. Rose, she said, had come back from Berlin handsomer than ever, and playing, she supposed, magnificently. At any rate, the letters which followed her in shoals from Berlin flattered her to the skies, and during the three months preceding her return Joachim himself had taken her as a pupil and given her unusual attention.

'And now, of course,' wrote Catherine, 'she is desperately disappointed that mamma and Agnes cannot join her in town, as she had hoped. She does her best, I know, poor child, to conceal it and to feel as she ought about mamma, but I can see that the idea of an indefinite time at Burwood is intolerable to her. As to Berlin, I think she has enjoyed it, but she talks very scornfully of German *Schwärmerei* and German women, and she tells the oddest stories of her professors. With one or two of them she seems to have been in a state of war from the beginning; but some of them, my dear Robert, I am persuaded were just simply in love with her!

'I don't — no, I never *shall* believe, that independent exciting student's life is good for a girl. But I never say so to Rose. When she forgets to be irritable and to feel that the world is going against her, she is often very sweet to me, and I can't bear there should be any conflict.'

His next day's letter contained the following: —

'Are you properly amused, sir, at your wife's performances in town? Our three concerts you have heard all about. I still can't get over them. I go about haunted by the *seriousness*, the life-and-death interest people throw into music. It is astonishing! And outside, as we got into our hansom, such sights and sounds! — such starved fierce-looking men, such ghastly women!

'But since then Rose has been taking me into society. Yesterday afternoon, after I wrote to you, we went to see Rose's artistic friends — the Piersons — with whom she was staying last summer, and to-day we have even called on Lady Charlotte Wynnstay.

'As to Mrs. Pierson, I never saw such an odd bundle of ribbons and rags and queer embroideries as she looked when we called. However, Rose says that, for "an æsthete" — she despises them now herself — Mrs. Pierson has wonderful taste, and that her wall-papers and her gowns, if I only understood them, are not the least like those of other æsthetic persons, but very *recherche* — which may be. She talked to Rose of nothing but acting, especially of Madame Desforêts. No one, according to her, has anything to do with an actress's private life, or ought to take it into account. But, Robert, dear, — an actress is a woman, and has a soul!

'Then Lady Charlotte, — you would have laughed at our *entree*.

'We found she was in town, and went on her "day," as she had asked Rose to do. The room was rather dark — none of these London rooms seem to me to

have any light and air in them. The butler got our names wrong, and I marched in first, more shy than I ever have been before in my life. Lady Charlotte had two gentlemen with her. She evidently did not know me in the least; she stood staring at me with her eyeglass on, and her cap so crooked I could think of nothing but a wish to put it straight. Then Rose followed, and in a few minutes it seemed to me as though it were Rose who were hostess, talking to the two gentlemen and being kind to Lady Charlotte. I am sure everybody in the room was amused by her self-possession, Lady Charlotte included. The gentlemen stared at her a great deal, and Lady Charlotte paid her one or two compliments on her looks, which *I* thought she would not have ventured to pay to any one in her own circle.

'We stayed about half an hour. One of the gentlemen was, I believe, a member of the Government, an under-secretary for something, but he and Rose and Lady Charlotte talked again of nothing but musicians and actors. It is strange that politicians should have time to know so much of these things. The other gentleman reminded me of Hotspur's popinjay. I think now I made out that he wrote for the newspapers, but at the moment I should have felt it insulting to accuse him of anything so humdrum as an occupation in life. He discovered somehow that I had an interest in the Church, and he asked me, leaning back in his chair and lisping, whether I really thought "the Church could still totter on a while in the rural dithtricts." He was informed her condition was so "vewy dethperate."

'Then I laughed outright, and found my tongue. Perhaps his next article on the Church will have a few facts in it. I did my best to put some into him. Rose at last looked round at me, astonished. But he did not dislike me, I think. I was not impertinent to him, husband mine. If I might have described just *one* of your days to his high-and-mightiness! There is no need to tell you, I think, whether I did or not.

'Then when we got up to go, Lady Charlotte asked Rose to stay with her. Rose explained why she could n't, and Lady Charlotte pitied her dreadfully for having a family, and the under-secretary said that it was one's first duty in life to trample on one's relations, and that he hoped nothing would prevent his hearing her play some time later in the year. Rose said very decidedly she should be in town for the winter. Lady Charlotte said she would have an evening specially for her, and as I said nothing, we got away at last.'

The letter of the following day recorded a little adventure: —

'I was much startled this morning. I had got Rose to come with me to the National Gallery on our way to her dressmaker. We were standing before Raphael's "Vigil of the Knight," when suddenly I saw Rose, who was looking away towards the door into the long gallery, turn perfectly white. I followed her eyes, and there, in the doorway, disappearing, — I am almost certain, — was Mr. Langham! One cannot mistake his walk or his profile. Before I could say a word Rose had walked away to another wall of pictures, and when we joined again we did not speak of it. Did he

see us, I wonder, and purposely avoid us? Something made me think so.

'Oh, I wish I could believe she had forgotten him! I am certain she would laugh me to angry scorn if I mentioned him; but there she sits by the fire now, while I am writing, quite drooping and pale, because she thinks I am not noticing. If she did but love me a little more! It must be my fault, I know.

'Yes, as you say, Burwood may as well be shut up or let. My dear, dear father!'

Robert could imagine the sigh with which Catherine had laid down her pen. Dear tender soul, with all its old-world fidelities and pieties pure and unimpaired! He raised the signature to his lips.

Next day Catherine came back to him. Robert had no words too opprobrious for the widowed condition from which her return had rescued him. It seemed to Catherine, however, that life had been very full and keen with him since her departure! He lingered with her after supper, vowing that his club boys might make what hay in the study they pleased; he was going to tell her the news, whatever happened.

'I told you of my two dinners at the Hall? The first was just *tête-à-tête* with the squire — oh, and Mrs. Darcy, of course. I am always forgetting her, poor little thing, which is most ungrateful of me. A pathetic life that, Catherine. She seems to me, in her odd way, perpetually hungering for affection, for praise. No doubt, if she got them, she would n't know what to do with them. She would just touch and leave them as she does everything. Her talk and she are both as light and wandering as thistle-down. But still, mean-

while, she hungers, and is never satisfied. There seems to be something peculiarly antipathetic in her to the squire. I can't make it out. He is sometimes quite brutal to her when she is more inconsequent than usual. I often wonder she goes on living with him.'

Catherine made some indignant comment.

'Yes,' said Robert, musing. 'Yes, it is bad.'

But Catherine thought his tone might have been more unqualified, and marvelled again at the curious lenity of judgement he had always shown of late towards Mr. Wendover. And all his judgements of himself and others were generally so quick, so uncompromising!

'On the second occasion we had Freake and Dashwood,' naming two well-known English antiquarians. 'Very learned, very jealous, and very snuffy; altogether "too genuine," as poor mother used to say of those old chairs we got for the dining-room. But afterwards when we were all smoking in the library, the squire came out of his shell and talked. I never heard him more brilliant!'

He paused a moment, his bright eyes looking far away from her, as though fixed on the scene he was describing.

'Such a mind!' he said at last, with a long breath, 'such a memory! Catherine, my book has been making great strides since you left. With Mr. Wendover to go to, all the problems are simplified. One is saved all false starts, all beating about the bush. What a piece of luck it was that put one down beside such a guide, such a living storehouse of knowledge!'

He spoke in a glow of energy and enthusiasm.

Catherine sat looking at him wistfully, her grey eyes crossed by many varying shades of memory and feeling.

At last his look met hers, and the animation of it softened at once, grew gentle.

'Do you think I am making knowledge too much of a god just now, Madonna mine?' he said, throwing himself down beside her. 'I have been full of qualms myself. The squire excites one so, makes one feel as though intellect — accumulation — were the whole of life. But I struggle against it — I do. I go on, for instance, trying to make the squire do his social duties — behave like "a human."'

Catherine could not help smiling at his tone.

'Well?' she inquired.

He shook his head ruefully.

'The squire is a tough customer — most men of sixty-seven with strong wills are, I suppose. At any rate, he is like one of the Thurston trout — sees through all my manœuvres. But one piece of news will astonish you, Catherine!' And he sprang up to deliver it with effect. 'Henslowe is dismissed.'

'Henslowe dismissed!' Catherine sat properly amazed while Robert told the story.

The dismissal of Henslowe indeed represented the price which Mr. Wendover had been so far willing to pay for Elsmere's society. Some *quid pro quo* there must be — that he was prepared to admit — considering their relative positions as squire and parson. But, as Robert shrewdly suspected, not one of his wiles so far had imposed on the master of Murewell. He had his own sarcastic smiles over them, and over Elsmere's pastoral *naïveté* in general. The evidences

of the young rector's power and popularity were, however, on the whole, pleasant to Mr. Wendover. If Elsmere had his will with all the rest of the world, Mr. Wendover knew perfectly well who it was that at the present moment had his will with Elsmere. He had found a great piquancy in this shaping of a mind more intellectually eager and pliant than any he had yet come across among younger men; perpetual food too, for his sense of irony, in the intellectual contradictions, wherein Elsmere's developing ideas and information were now, according to the squire, involving him at every turn.

'His religious foundations are gone already, if he did but know it,' Mr. Wendover grimly remarked to himself one day about this time, 'but he will take so long finding it out that the results are not worth speculating on.'

Cynically assured, therefore, at bottom of his own power with this ebullient nature, the squire was quite prepared to make external concessions, or, as we have said, to pay his price. It annoyed him that when Elsmere would press for allotment land, or a new institute, or a better supply of water for the village, it was not open to him merely to give *carte blanche*, and refer his petitioner to Henslowe. Robert's opinion of Henslowe, and Henslowe's now more cautious but still incessant hostility to the rector, were patent at last even to the squire. The situation was worrying and wasted time. It must be changed.

So one morning he met Elsmere with a bundle of letters in his hand, calmly informed him that Henslowe had been sent about his business, and that it would be

a kindness if Mr. Elsmere would do him the favour of looking through some applications for the vacant post just received.

Elsmere, much taken by surprise, felt at first as it was natural for an over-sensitive, over-scrupulous man to feel. His enemy had been given into his hand, and instead of victory he could only realise that he had brought a man to ruin.

'He has a wife and children,' he said quickly, looking at the squire.

'Of course I have pensioned him,' replied the squire impatiently; 'otherwise I imagine he would be hanging round our necks to the end of the chapter.'

There was something in the careless indifference of the tone which sent a shiver through Elsmere. After all, this man had served the squire for fifteen years, and it was not Mr. Wendover who had much to complain of.

No one with a conscience could have held out a finger to keep Henslowe in his post. But though Elsmere took the letters and promised to give them his best attention, as soon as he got home he made himself irrationally miserable over the matter. It was not his fault that, from the moment of his arrival in the parish, Henslowe had made him the target of a vulgar and embittered hostility, and so far as he had struck out in return it had been for the protection of persecuted and defenceless creatures. But all the same, he could not get the thought of the man's collapse and humiliation out of his mind. How at his age was he to find other work, and how was he to endure life at Murewell without his comfortable house, his smart gig,

his easy command of spirits, and the cringing of the farmers?

Tormented by the sordid misery of the situation almost as though it had been his own, Elsmere ran down impulsively in the evening to the agent's house. Could nothing be done to assure the man that he was not really his enemy, and that anything the parson's influence and the parson's money could do to help him to a more decent life, and work which offered fewer temptations and less power over human beings, should be done?

It need hardly be said that the visit was a complete failure. Henslowe, who was drinking hard, no sooner heard Elsmere's voice in the little hall than he dashed open the door which separated them, and, in a paroxysm of drunken rage, hurled at Elsmere all the venomous stuff he had been garnering up for months against some such occasion. The vilest abuse, the foulest charges — there was nothing that the maddened sot, now fairly unmasked, denied himself. Elsmere, pale and erect, tried to make himself heard. In vain. Henslowe was physically incapable of taking in a word.

At last the agent, beside himself, made a rush, his three untidy children, who had been hanging open-mouthed in the background, set up a howl of terror, and his Scotch wife, more pinched and sour than ever, who had been so far a gloomy spectator of the scene, interposed.

'Have doon wi' ye,' she said sullenly, putting out a long bony arm in front of her husband, 'or I'll just lock oop that brandy where ye'll naw find it if ye pull

the house doon. Now, sir,' turning to Elsmere, 'would ye jest be going? Ye mean it weel, I daur say, but ye 've doon yer wark, and ye maun leave it.'

And she motioned him out, not without a sombre dignity. Elsmere went home crestfallen. The enthusiast is a good deal too apt to underestimate the stubbornness of moral fact, and these rebuffs have their stern uses for character.

'They intend to go on living here, I am told,' Elsmere said, as he wound up the story, 'and as Henslowe is still churchwarden, he may do us a world of mischief yet. However, I think that wife will keep him in order. No doubt vengeance would be sweet to her as to him, but she has a shrewd eye, poor soul, to the squire's remittances. It is a wretched business, and I don't take a man's hate easily, Catherine! — though it may be a folly to say so.'

Catherine was irresponsive. The Old Testament element in her found a lawful satisfaction, in Henslowe's fall, and a wicked man's hatred, according to her, mattered only to himself. The squire's conduct, on the other hand, made her uneasily proud. To her, naturally, it simply meant that he was falling under Robert's spell. So much the better for him, but —

## CHAPTER XXIV

THAT same afternoon Robert started on a walk to a distant farm, where one of his Sunday-school boys lay recovering from rheumatic fever. The rector had his pocket full of articles — a story-book in one, a puzzle map in the other — destined for Master Carter's amusement. On the way he was to pick up Mr. Wendover at the park gates.

It was a delicious April morning. A soft west wind blew through leaf and grass —

> 'Driving sweet buds, like flocks, to feed in air.'

The spring was stirring everywhere, and Robert raced along, feeling in every vein a life, an ebullience akin to that of Nature. As he neared the place of meeting it occurred to him that the squire had been unusually busy lately, unusually silent and absent too on their walks. What *was* he always at work on? Robert had often inquired of him as to the nature of those piles of proof and manuscript with which his table was littered. The squire had never given any but the most general answer, and had always changed the subject. There was an invincible *personal* reserve about him which, through all his walks and talks with Elsmere, had never as yet broken down. He would talk of other men and other men's labours by the hour, but not of his own. Elsmere reflected on the fact, mingling with the reflexion a certain humorous scorn of his own constant openness and readiness to take counsel with the world.

'However, *his* book is n't a mere excuse, as Langham's is,' Elsmere inwardly remarked. 'Langham, in a certain sense, plays even with learning; Mr. Wendover plays at nothing.'

By the way, he had a letter from Langham in his pocket much more cheerful and human than usual. Let him look through it again.

Not a word, of course, of that National Gallery experience! — a circumstance, however, which threw no light on it either way.

'I find myself a good deal reconciled to life by this migration of mine,' wrote Langham. 'Now that my enforced duties to them are all done with, my fellow-creatures seem to me much more decent fellows than before. The great stir of London, in which, unless I please, I have no part whatever, attracts me more than I could have thought possible. No one in these noisy streets has any rightful claim upon me. I have cut away at one stroke lectures, and Boards of Studies, and tutors' meetings, and all the rest of the wearisome Oxford make-believe, and the creature left behind feels lighter and nimbler than he has felt for years. I go to concerts and theatres; I look at the people in the streets; I even begin to take an outsider's interest in social questions, in the puny dykes which well-meaning people are trying to raise all round us against the encroaching, devastating labour-troubles of the future. By dint of running away from life, I may end by cutting a much more passable figure in it than before. Be consoled, my dear Elsmere; reconsider your remonstrances.'

There, under the great cedar by the gate, stood Mr. Wendover. Illumined as he was by the spring sunshine, he struck Elsmere as looking unusually shrunken and old. And yet under the look of physical exhaustion there was a new serenity, almost a peacefulness of expression, which gave the whole man a different aspect.

'Don't take me far,' he said abruptly, as they started. 'I have not got the energy for it. I have been overworking, and must go away.'

'I have been sure of it for some time,' said Elsmere warmly. 'You ought to have a long rest. But may n't I know, Mr. Wendover, before you take it, what this great task is you have been toiling at? Remember, you have never told me a word of it.'

And Elsmere's smile had in it a touch of most friendly reproach. Fatigue had left the scholar relaxed, comparatively defenceless. His sunk and wrinkled eyes lit up with a smile, faint indeed, but of unwonted softness.

'A task indeed,' he said with a sigh, 'the task of a lifetime. To-day I finished the second third of it. Probably before the last section is begun some interloping German will have stepped down before me; it is the way of the race! But for the moment there is the satisfaction of having come to an end of some sort — a natural halt, at any rate.'

Elsmere's eyes were still interrogative. 'Oh, well,' said the squire hastily, 'it is a book I planned just after I took my doctor's degree at Berlin. It struck me then as the great want of modern scholarship. It is a "History of Evidence," or rather, more strictly, a "History of *Testimony*."'

Robert started. The library flashed into his mind, and Langham's figure in the long grey coat sitting on the stool.

'A great subject,' he said slowly, 'a magnificent subject. How have you conceived it, I wonder?'

'Simply from the standpoint of evolution, of development. The philosophical value of the subject is enormous. You must have considered it, of course; every historian must. But few people have any idea in detail of the amount of light which the history of human witness in the world, systematically carried through, throws on the history of the human mind; that is to say, on the history of ideas.'

The squire paused, his keen scrutinising look dwelling on the face beside him, as though to judge whether he were understood.

'Oh, true!' cried Elsmere; 'most true. Now I know what vague want it is that has been haunting me for months —'

He stopped short, his look, aglow with all the young thinker's ardour, fixed on the squire.

The squire received the outburst in silence — a somewhat ambiguous silence.

'But go on,' said Elsmere; 'please go on.'

'Well, you remember,' said the squire slowly, 'that when Tractarianism began I was for a time one of Newman's victims. Then, when Newman departed, I went over body and bones to the Liberal reaction which followed his going. In the first ardour of what seemed to me a release from slavery I migrated to Berlin, in search of knowledge which there was no getting in England, and there, with the taste of a

dozen aimless theological controversies still in my mouth, this idea first took hold of me. It was simply this: — Could one through an exhaustive examination of human records, helped by modern physiological and mental science, get at the conditions, physical and mental, which govern the greater or lesser correspondence between human witness and the fact it reports?'

'A giant's task!' cried Robert; 'hardly conceivable!'

The squire smiled slightly — the smile of a man who looks back with indulgent half-melancholy satire on the rash ambitions of his youth.

'Naturally,' he resumed, 'I soon saw I must restrict myself to European testimony, and that only up to the Renaissance. To do that, of course, I had to dig into the East, to learn several Oriental languages — Sanskrit among them. Hebrew I already knew. Then, when I had got my languages, I began to work steadily through the whole mass of existing records, sifting and comparing. It is thirty years since I started. Fifteen years ago I finished the section dealing with classical antiquity — with India, Persia, Egypt, and Judea. To-day I have put the last strokes to a History of Testimony from the Christian era down to the sixth century — from Livy to Gregory of Tours, from Augustus to Justinian.'

Elsmere turned to him with wonder, with a movement of irrepressible homage. Thirty years of unbroken solitary labour for one end, one cause! In our hurried fragmentary life, a purpose of this tenacity, this power of realising itself, strikes the imagination.

'And your two books?'

'Were a mere interlude,' replied the squire briefly.

'After the completion of the first part of my work, there were certain deposits left in me which it was a relief to get rid of, especially in connexion with my renewed impressions of England,' he added drily.

Elsmere was silent, thinking this then was the explanation of the squire's minute and exhaustive knowledge of the early Christian centuries, a knowledge into which — apart from certain forbidden topics — he had himself dipped so freely. Suddenly, as he mused, there awoke in the young man a new hunger, a new unmanageable impulse towards frankness of speech. All his nascent intellectual powers were alive and clamorous. For the moment his past reticences and timidities looked to him absurd. The mind rebelled against the barriers it had been rearing against itself. It rushed on to sweep them away, crying out that all this shrinking from free discussion had been at bottom 'a mere treason to faith.'

'Naturally, Mr. Wendover,' he said at last, and his tone had a half-defiant, half-nervous energy, 'you have given your best attention all these years to the Christian problems.'

'Naturally,' said the squire drily.

Then, as his companion still seemed to wait, keenly expectant, he resumed, with something cynical in the smile which accompanied the words, —

'But I have no wish to infringe our convention.'

'A convention was it?' replied Elsmere, flushing. 'I think I only wanted to make my own position clear and prevent misunderstanding. But it is impossible that I should be indifferent to the results of thirty years' such work as you can give to so great a subject.'

The squire drew himself up a little under his cloak and seemed to consider. His tired eyes, fixed on the spring lane before them, saw in reality only the long retrospects of the past. Then a light broke in them, transformed them — a light of battle. He turned to the man beside him, and his sharp look swept over him from head to foot. Well, if he would have it, let him have it. He had been contemptuously content so far to let the subject be. But Mr. Wendover, in spite of his philosophy, had never been proof all his life against an anti-clerical instinct worthy almost of a Paris municipal councillor. In spite of his fatigue there woke in him a kind of cruel whimsical pleasure at the notion of speaking, once for all, what he conceived to be the whole bare truth to this clever attractive dreamer, to the young fellow who thought he could condescend to science from the standpoint of the Christian miracles!

'Results?' he said interrogatively. 'Well, as you will understand, it is tolerably difficult to summarise such a mass at a moment's notice. But I can give you the lines of my last volumes, if it would interest you to hear them.'

That walk prolonged itself far beyond Mr. Wendover's original intention. There was something in the situation, in Elsmere's comments, or arguments, or silences, which after a while banished the scholar's sense of exhaustion and made him oblivious of the country distances. No man feels another's soul quivering and struggling in his grasp without excitement, let his nerve and his self-restraint be what they may.

As for Elsmere, that hour and a half, little as he

realised it at the time, represented the turning-point of life. He listened, he suggested, he put in an acute remark here, an argument there, such as the squire had often difficulty in meeting. Every now and then the inner protest of an attacked faith would break through in words so full of poignancy, in imagery so dramatic, that the squire's closely-knit sentences would be for the moment wholly disarranged. On the whole, he proved himself no mean guardian of all that was most sacred to himself and to Catherine, and the squire's intellectual respect for him rose considerably.

All the same, by the end of their conversation that first period of happy unclouded youth we have been considering was over for poor Elsmere. In obedience to certain inevitable laws and instincts of the mind, he had been for months tempting his fate, inviting catastrophe. None the less did the first sure approaches of that catastrophe fill him with a restless resistance which was in itself anguish.

As to the squire's talk, it was simply the outpouring of one of the richest, most sceptical, and most highly-trained of minds on the subject of Christian origins. At no previous period of his life would it have greatly affected Elsmere. But now at every step the ideas, impressions, arguments bred in him by his months of historical work and ordinary converse with the squire rushed in, as they had done once before, to cripple resistance, to check an emerging answer, to justify Mr. Wendover.

We may quote a few fragmentary utterances taken almost at random from the long wrestle of the two

men, for the sake of indicating the main lines of a bitter after-struggle.

'Testimony like every other human product has *developed*. Man's power of apprehending and recording what he sees and hears has grown from less to more, from weaker to stronger, like any other of his faculties, just as the reasoning powers of the cave-dweller have developed into the reasoning powers of a Kant. What one wants is the ordered proof of this, and it can be got from history and experience.'

To plunge into the Christian period without having first cleared the mind as to what is meant in history and literature by "the critical method," which in history may be defined as "the science of what is credible," and in literature as "the science of what is rational," is to invite fiasco. The theologian in such a state sees no obstacle to accepting an arbitrary list of documents with all the strange stuff they may contain, and declaring them to be sound historical material, while he applies to all the strange stuff of a similar kind surrounding them the most rigorous principles of modern science. Or he has to make-believe that the reasoning processes exhibited in the speeches of the Acts, in certain passages of St. Paul's Epistles, or in the Old Testament quotations in the Gospels, have a validity for the mind of the nineteenth century, when in truth they are the imperfect, half-childish products of the mind of the first century, of quite insignificant or indirect value to the historian of fact, of enormous value to the historian of *testimony* and its varieties.'

'Suppose, for instance, before I begin to deal with the Christian story, and the earliest Christian development, I try to make out beforehand what are the moulds, the channels into which the testimony of the time must run. I look for these moulds, of course, in the dominant ideas, the intellectual preconceptions and preoccupations existing when the period begins.

In the first place, I shall find present in the age which saw the birth of Christianity, as in so many other ages, a universal preconception in favour of miracle — that is to say, of deviations from the common norm of experience, governing the work of *all* men of *all* schools. Very well, allow for it then. Read the testimony of the period in the light of it. Be prepared for the inevitable differences between it and the testimony of your own day. The witness of the time is not true, nor, in the strict sense, false. It is merely incompetent, half-trained, pre-scientific, but all through perfectly natural. The wonder would have been to have had a Life of Christ without miracles. The air teems with them. The East is full of Messiahs. Even a Tacitus is superstitious. Even a Vespasian works miracles. Even a Nero cannot die, but fifty years after his death is still looked for as the inaugurator of a millennium of horror. The Resurrection is partly invented, partly imagined, partly ideally true — in any case wholly intelligible and natural, as a product of the age, when once you have the key of that age.

'In the next place, look for the preconceptions that have a definite historical origin; those, for instance, flowing from the pre-Christian, apocalyptic literature

of the Jews, taking the Maccabean legend of Daniel as the centre of inquiry — those flowing from Alexandrian Judaism and the school of Philo — those flowing from the Palestinian schools of exegesis. Examine your synoptic gospels, your Gospel of St. John, your Apocalypse, in the light of these. You have no other chance of understanding them. But so examined, they fall into place, become explicable and rational; such material as science can make full use of. The doctrine of the Divinity of Christ, Christian eschatology, and Christian views of prophecy will also have found *their* place in a sound historical scheme!'

'It is discreditable now for the man of intelligence to refuse to read his Livy in the light of his Mommsen. My object has been to help in making it discreditable to him to refuse to read his Christian documents in the light of a trained scientific criticism. We shall have made some positive advance in rationality when the man who is perfectly capable of dealing sanely with legend in one connexion, and, in another, will insist on confounding it with history proper, cannot do so any longer without losing caste, without falling *ipso facto* out of court with men of education. It is enough for a man of letters if he has helped ever so little in the final staking-out of the boundaries between reason and unreason!'

And so on. These are mere ragged gleanings from an ample store. The discussion in reality ranged over the whole field of history, plunged into philosophy, and into the subtlest problems of mind. At the end

of it, after he had been conscious for many bitter moments of that same constriction of heart which had overtaken him once before at Mr. Wendover's hands, the religious passion in Elsmere once more rose with sudden stubborn energy against the iron negations pressed upon it.

'I will not fight you any more, Mr. Wendover,' he said, with his moved flashing look. 'I am perfectly conscious that my own mental experience of the last two years has made it necessary to re-examine some of these intellectual foundations of faith. But as to the faith itself, that is its own witness. It does not depend, after all, upon anything external, but upon the living voice of the Eternal in the soul of man!'

Involuntarily his pace quickened. The whole man was gathered into one great, useless, pitiful defiance, and the outer world was forgotten. The squire kept up with difficulty a while, a faint glimmer of sarcasm playing now and then round the straight thin-lipped mouth. Then suddenly he stopped.

'No, let it be. Forget me and my book, Elsmere. Everything can be got out of in this world. By the way, we seem to have reached the ends of the earth. Those are the new Mile End cottages, I believe. With your leave, I'll sit down in one of them, and send to the Hall for the carriage.'

Elsmere's repentant attention was drawn at once to his companion.

'I am a selfish idiot,' he said hotly, 'to have led you into over-walking and over-talking like this.'

The squire made some short reply and instantly turned the matter off. The momentary softness which

had marked his meeting with Elsmere had entirely vanished, leaving only the Mr. Wendover of every day, who was merely made awkward and unapproachable by the slightest touch of personal sympathy. No living being, certainly not his foolish little sister, had any *right* to take care of the squire. And as the signs of age became more apparent, this one fact had often worked powerfully on the sympathies of Elsmere's chivalrous youth, though as yet he had been no more capable than any one else of breaking through the squire's haughty reserve.

As they turned down the newly-worn track to the cottages, whereof the weekly progress had been for some time the delight of Elsmere's heart, they met old Meyrick in his pony-carriage. He stopped his shambling steed at sight of the pair. The bleared spectacled eyes lit up, the prim mouth broke into a smile which matched the April sun.

'Well, Squire; well, Mr. Elsmere, are you going to have a look at those places? Never saw such palaces. I only hope I may end my days in anything so good. Will you give me a lease, Squire?'

Mr. Wendover's deep eyes took a momentary survey, half-indulgent, half-contemptuous, of the naïve, awkward-looking old creature in the pony-carriage. Then, without troubling to find an answer, he went his way.

Robert stayed chatting a moment or two, knowing perfectly well what Meyrick's gay garrulity meant. A sharp and bitter sense of the ironies of life swept across him. The squire humanised, influenced by him — he knew that was the image in Meyrick's mind; he remem-

bered with a quiet scorn its presence in his own. And never, never had he felt his own weakness and the strength of that grim personality so much as at that instant.

That evening Catherine noticed an unusual silence and depression in Robert. She did her best to cheer it away, to get at the cause of it. In vain. At last, with her usual wise tenderness, she left him alone, conscious herself, as she closed the study-door behind her, of a momentary dreariness of soul, coming she knew not whence, and only dispersed by the instinctive upward leap of prayer.

Robert was no sooner alone than he put down his pipe and sat brooding over the fire. All the long debate of the afternoon began to fight itself out again in the shrinking mind. Suddenly, in his restless pain, a thought occurred to him. He had been much struck in the squire's conversation by certain allusions to arguments drawn from the Book of Daniel. It was not a subject with which Robert had any great familiarity. He remembered his Pusey dimly, certain Divinity lectures, an article of Wescott's.

He raised his hand quickly and took down the monograph on 'The Use of the Old Testament in the New,' which the squire had sent him in the earliest days of their acquaintance. A secret dread and repugnance had held him from it till now. Curiously enough it was not he but Catherine, as we shall see, who had opened it first. Now, however, he got it down and turned to the section on Daniel.

It was a change of conviction on the subject of the date and authorship of this strange product of Jewish

patriotism in the second century before Christ that drove M. Renan out of the Church of Rome. 'For the Catholic Church to confess,' he says in his 'Souvenirs,' 'that Daniel is an apocryphal book of the time of the Maccabees, would be to confess that she had made a mistake; if she had made this mistake, she may have made others; she is no longer divinely inspired.'

The Protestant, who is in truth more bound to the Book of Daniel than M. Renan, has various ways of getting over the difficulties raised against the supposed authorship of the book by modern criticism. Robert found all these ways enumerated in the brilliant and vigorous pages of the book before him.

In the first place, like the orthodox Saint-Sulpicien, the Protestant meets the critic with a flat *non possumus*. 'Your arguments are useless and irrelevant,' he says in effect. 'However plausible may be your objections, the Book of Daniel *is* what it professes to be, *because* our Lord quoted it in such a manner as to distinctly recognise its authority. The All-True and All-Knowing cannot have made a mistake, nor can He have expressly led His disciples to regard as genuine and Divine, prophecies which were in truth the inventions of an ingenious romancer.'

But the Liberal Anglican — the man, that is to say, whose logical sense is inferior to his sense of literary probabilities — proceeds quite differently.

'Your arguments are perfectly just,' he says to the critic; 'the book is a patriotic fraud, of no value except to the historian of literature. But how do you know that our Lord quoted it as *true* in the strict sense? In fact He quoted it as *literature*, as a Greek might have

quoted Homer, as an Englishman might quote Shakespeare.'

And many a harassed Churchman takes refuge forthwith in the new explanation. It is very difficult, no doubt, to make the passages in the Gospels agree with it, but at the bottom of his mind there is a saving silent scorn for the old theories of inspiration. He admits to himself that probably Christ was not correctly reported in the matter.

Then appears the critic, having no interests to serve, no *parti pris* to defend, and states the matter calmly, dispassionately, as it appears to him. 'No reasonable man,' says the ablest German exponent of the Book of Daniel, 'can doubt' — that this most interesting piece of writing belongs to the year 169 or 170 B. C. It was written to stir up the courage and patriotism of the Jews, weighed down by the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes. It had enormous vogue. It inaugurated a new Apocalyptic literature. And clearly the youth of Jesus of Nazareth was vitally influenced by it. It entered into his thought, it helped to shape his career.

But Elsmere did not trouble himself much with the critic, as at any rate he was reported by the author of the book before him. Long before the critical case was reached, he had flung the book heavily from him. The mind accomplished its further task without help from outside. In the stillness of the night there rose up weirdly before him a whole new mental picture — effacing, pushing out, innumerable older images of thought. It was the image of a purely human Christ — a purely human, explicable, yet always wonderful

Christianity. It broke his heart, but the spell of it was like some dream-country wherein we see all the familiar objects of life in new relations and perspectives. He gazed upon it fascinated, the wailing underneath checked a while by the strange beauty and order of the emerging spectacle. Only a little while! Then with a groan Elsmere looked up, his eyes worn, his lips white and set.

'I must face it — I must face it through! God help me!'

A slight sound overhead in Catherine's room sent a sudden spasm of feeling through the young face. He threw himself down, hiding from his own foresight of what was to be.

'My darling, my darling! But she shall know nothing of it — yet.'

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## CHAPTER XXV

And he did face it through.

The next three months were the bitterest months of Elsmere's life. They were marked by anguished mental struggle, by a consciousness of painful separation from the soul nearest to his own, and by a constantly increasing sense of oppression, of closing avenues and narrowing alternatives, which for weeks together seemed to hold the mind in a grip whence there was no escape.

That struggle was not hurried and embittered by the bodily presence of the squire. Mr. Wendover went off to Italy a few days after the conversation we have described. But though he was not present in the flesh the great book of his life was in Elsmere's hands, he had formally invited Elsmere's remarks upon it; and the air of Murewell seemed still echoing with his sentences, still astir with his thoughts. That curious instinct of pursuit, that avid imperious wish to crush an irritating resistance, which his last walk with Elsmere had first awakened in him with any strength, persisted. He wrote to Robert from abroad, and the proud fastidious scholar had never taken more pains with anything than with those letters.

Robert might have stopped them, might have cast the whole matter from him with one resolute effort. In other relations he had will enough and to spare.

Was it an unexpected weakness of fibre that made

it impossible? — that had placed him in this way at the squire's disposal? Half the world would answer yes. Might not the other half plead that in every generation there is a minority of these mobile, impressionable, defenceless natures, who are ultimately at the mercy of experience, at the mercy of thought, at the mercy (shall we say?) of truth; and that, in fact, it is from this minority that all human advance comes?

During these three miserable months it cannot be said — poor Elsmere! — that he attempted any systematic study of Christian evidence. His mind was too much torn, his heart too sore. He pounced feverishly on one test point after another, on the Pentateuch, the Prophets, the relation of the New Testament to the thoughts and beliefs of its time, the Gospel of St. John, the evidence as to the Resurrection, the intellectual and moral conditions surrounding the formation of the Canon. His mind swayed hither and thither, driven from each resting-place in turn by the pressure of some new difficulty. And — let it be said again — all through, the only constant element in the whole dismal process was his trained historical sense. If he had gone through this conflict at Oxford, for instance, he would have come out of it unscathed; for he would simply have remained throughout it ignorant of the true problems at issue. As it was, the keen instrument he had sharpened so laboriously on indifferent material now ploughed its agonising way, bit by bit, into the most intimate recesses of thought and faith.

Much of the actual struggle he was able to keep from Catherine's view, as he had vowed to himself to keep

it. For after the squire's departure Mrs. Darcy too went joyously up to London to flutter a while through the golden alleys of Mayfair; and Elsmere was left once more in undisturbed possession of the Murewell library. There for a while on every day — oh, pitiful relief! — he could hide himself from the eyes he loved.

But, after all, married love allows of nothing but the shallowest concealments. Catherine had already had one or two alarms. Once, in Robert's study, among a tumbled mass of books he had pulled out in search of something missing, and which she was putting in order, she had come across that very book on the Prophecies which at a critical moment had so deeply affected Elsmere. It lay open, and Catherine was caught by the heading of a section: 'The Messianic Idea.'

She began to read, mechanically at first, and read about a page. That page so shocked a mind accustomed to a purely traditional and mystical interpretation of the Bible that the book dropped abruptly from her hand, and she stood a moment by her husband's table, her fine face pale and frowning.

She noticed, with bitterness, Mr. Wendover's name on the title-page. Was it right for Robert to have such books? Was it wise, was it prudent, for the Christian to measure himself against such antagonism as this? She wrestled painfully with the question. 'Oh, but I can't understand,' she said to herself with an almost agonised energy. 'It is I who am timid, faithless! He *must* — he *must* — know what they say; he must have gone through the dark places if he is to carry others through them.'

So she stilled and trampled on the inward protest. She yearned to speak of it to Robert, but something withheld her. In her passionate wifely trust she could not bear to seem to question the use he made of his time and thought; and a delicate moral scruple warned her she might easily allow her dislike of the Wendover friendship to lead her into exaggeration and injustice.

But the stab of that moment recurred — dealt now by one slight incident, now by another. And after the squire's departure Catherine suddenly realised that the whole atmosphere of their home-life was changed.

Robert was giving himself to his people with a more scrupulous energy than ever. Never had she seen him so pitiful, so full of heart for every human creature. His sermons, with their constant imaginative dwelling on the earthly life of Jesus, affected her now with a poignancy, a pathos, which were almost unbearable. And his tenderness to *her* was beyond words. But with that tenderness there was constantly mixed a note of remorse, a painful self-depreciation which she could hardly notice in speech, but which every now and then wrung her heart. And in his parish work he often showed a depression, an irritability, entirely new to her. He who had always the happiest power of forgetting to-morrow all the rubs of to-day, seemed now quite incapable of saving himself and his cheerfulness in the old ways, nay, had developed a capacity for sheer worry she had never seen in him before. And meanwhile, all the old gossips of the place spoke their mind freely to Catherine on the subject of the rector's looks, coupling their remarks with a variety of prescriptions, out of which Robert did sometimes manage

to get one of his old laughs. His sleeplessness, too, which had always been a constitutional tendency, had become now so constant and wearing that Catherine began to feel a nervous hatred of his book-work, and of those long mornings at the Hall; a passionate wish to put an end to it, and carry him away for a holiday.

But he would not hear of the holiday, and he could hardly bear any talk of himself. And Catherine had been brought up in a school of feeling which bade love be very scrupulous, very delicate, and which recognised in the strongest way the right of every human soul to its own privacy, its own reserves. That something definite troubled him she was certain. What it was he clearly avoided telling her, and she could not hurt him by impatience.

He would tell her soon — when it was right — she cried pitifully to herself. Meantime both suffered, she not knowing why, clinging to each other the while more passionately than ever.

One night, however, coming down in her dressing-gown into the study in search of a *Christian Year* she had left behind her, she found Robert with papers strewn before him, his arms on the table and his head laid down upon them. He looked up as she came in, and the expression of his eyes drew her to him irresistibly.

'Were you asleep, Robert? Do come to bed!'

He sat up, and with a pathetic gesture held out his arms to her. She came on to his knee, putting her white arms round his neck, while he leant his head against her breast.

'Are you tired with all your walking to-day?' she said presently, a pang at her heart.

'I am tired,' he said, 'but not with walking.'

'Does your book worry you? You should n't work so hard, Robert — you should n't!'

He started.

'Don't talk of it. Don't let us talk or think at all, only feel!'

And he tightened his arms round her, happy once more for a moment in this environment of a perfect love. There was silence for a few moments, Catherine feeling more and more disturbed and anxious.

'Think of your mountains,' he said presently, his eyes still pressed against her, 'of High Fell, and the moonlight, and the house where Mary Backhouse died. Oh! Catherine, I see you still, and shall always see you, as I saw you then, my angel of healing and of grace!'

'I too have been thinking of her to-night,' said Catherine softly, 'and of the walk to Shanmoor. This evening in the garden it seemed to me as though there were Westmoreland scents in the air! I was haunted by a vision of bracken, and rocks, and sheep browsing up the fell slopes.'

'Oh for a breath of the wind on High Fell!' cried Robert, — it was so new to her, the dear voice with this accent in it of yearning depression! 'I want more of the spirit of the mountains, their serenity, their strength. Say me that Duddon sonnet you used to say to me there, as you said it to me that last Sunday before our wedding, when we walked up the Shanmoor road to say good-bye to that blessed spot. Oh!

how I sit and think of it sometimes, when life seems to be going crookedly, that rock on the fell-side where I found you, and caught you, and snared you, my dove, for ever.'

And Catherine, whose mere voice was as balm to this man of many impulses, repeated to him, softly in the midnight silence, those noble lines in which Wordsworth has expressed, with the reserve and yet the strength of the great poet, the loftiest yearning of the purest hearts —

> 'Enough, if something from our hand have power
> To live and move, and serve the future hour,
> And if, as towards the silent tomb we go,
> Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower,
> We feel that we are greater than we know.'

'He has divined it all,' said Robert, drawing a long breath when she stopped, which seemed to relax the fibres of the inner man, 'the fever and the fret of human thought, the sense of littleness, of impotence, of evanescence — and he has soothed it all!'

'Oh, not all, not all!' cried Catherine, her look kindling, and her rare passion breaking through; 'how little in comparison!'

For her thoughts were with Him of whom it was said, '*He needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man, for He knew what was in man.*' But Robert's only response was silence and a kind of quivering sigh.

'Robert!' she cried, pressing her cheek against his temple, 'tell me, my dear, dear husband, what it is troubles you. Something does — I am certain — certain!'

'Catherine — wife — beloved!' he said to her, after another pause, in a tone of strange tension she never forgot; 'generations of men and women have known what it is to be led spiritually into the desert, into that outer wilderness where even the Lord was "tempted." What am I that I should claim to escape it? And you cannot come through it with me, my darling — no, not even you! It is loneliness — it is solitariness itself' — and he shuddered. 'But pray for me — pray that *He* may be with me, and that at the end there may be light!'

He pressed her to him convulsively, then gently released her. His solemn eyes, fixed upon her as she stood there beside him, seemed to forbid her to say a word more. She stooped; she laid her lips to his; it was a meeting of soul with soul; then she went softly out, breaking the quiet of the house by a stifled sob as she passed upstairs.

Oh! but at last she thought she understood him. She had not passed her girlhood, side by side with a man of delicate fibre, of melancholy and scrupulous temperament, and within hearing of all the natural interests of a deeply religious mind, religious biography, religious psychology, and — within certain sharply defined limits — religious speculation, without being brought face to face with the black possibilities of 'doubts' and 'difficulties' as barriers in the Christian path. Has not almost every Christian of illustrious excellence been tried and humbled by them? Catherine, looking back upon her own youth, could remember certain crises of religious melancholy, during which she had often dropped off to sleep at night

on a pillow wet with tears. They had passed away quickly, and for ever. But she went back to them now, straining her eyes through the darkness of her own past, recalling her father's days of spiritual depression, and the few difficult words she had sometimes heard from him as to those bitter times of religious dryness and hopelessness, by which God chastens from time to time His most faithful and heroic souls. A half-contempt awoke in her for the unclouded serenity and confidence of her own inner life. If her own spiritual experience had gone deeper, she told herself with the strangest self-blame, she would have been able now to understand Robert better — to help him more.

She thought as she lay awake after those painful moments in the study, the tears welling up slowly in the darkness, of many things that had puzzled her in the past. She remembered the book she had seen on his table; her thoughts travelled over his months of intercourse with the squire; and the memory of Mr. Newcome's attitude towards the man whom he conceived to be his Lord's adversary, as contrasted with Robert's, filled her with a shrinking pain she dared not analyse.

Still all through, her feeling towards her husband was in the main akin to that of the English civilian at home towards English soldiers abroad, suffering and dying that England may be great. *She* had sheltered herself all her life from those deadly forces of unbelief which exist in English society, by a steady refusal to know what, however, any educated university man must perforce know. But such a course of action was impossible for Robert. He had been forced

into the open, into the full tide of the Lord's battle. The chances of that battle are many; and the more courage the more risk of wounds and pain. But the great Captain knows — the great Captain does not forget His own!

For never, never had she the smallest doubt as to the issue of this sudden crisis in her husband's consciousness, even when she came nearest to apprehending its nature. As well might she doubt the return of daylight, as dream of any permanent eclipse descending upon the faith which had shone through every detail of Robert's ardent impulsive life, with all its struggles, all its failings, all its beauty, since she had known him first. The dread did not even occur to her. In her agony of pity and reverence she thought of him as passing through a trial, which is specially the believer's trial — the chastening by which God proves the soul He loves. Let her only love and trust in patience.

So that day by day as Robert's depression still continued, Catherine surrounded him with the tenderest and wisest affection. Her quiet common sense made itself heard, forbidding her to make too much of the change in him, which might after all, she thought, be partly explained by the mere physical results of his long strain of body and mind during the Mile End epidemic. And for the rest she would not argue; she would not inquire. She only prayed that she might so lead the Christian life beside him, that the Lord's tenderness, the Lord's consolation, might shine upon him through her. It had never been her wont to speak to him much about his own influ-

ence, his own effect, in the parish. To the austerer Christian considerations of this kind are forbidden: 'It is not I, but Christ that worketh in me.' But now, whenever she came across any striking trace of his power over the weak or the impure, the sick or the sad, she would in some way make it known to him, offering it to him in her delicate tenderness, as though it were a gift that the Father had laid in her hand for him — a token that the Master was still indeed with His servant, and that all was fundamentally well!

And so much, perhaps, the contact with his wife's faith, the power of her love, wrought in Robert, that during these weeks and months he also never lost his own certainty of emergence from the shadow which had overtaken him. And, indeed, driven on from day to day as he was by an imperious intellectual thirst which would be satisfied, the religion of the heart, the imaginative emotional habit of years, that incessant drama which the soul enacts with the Divine Powers to which it feels itself committed, lived and persisted through it all. Feeling was untouched. The heart was still passionately on the side of all its old loves and adorations, still blindly trustful that in the end, by some compromise as yet unseen, they would be restored to it intact.

Some time towards the end of July Robert was coming home from the Hall before lunch, tired and worn, as the morning always left him, and meditating some fresh sheets of the squire's proofs which had been in his hands that morning. On the road crossing that to the rectory he suddenly saw Reginald Newcome, thinner and whiter than ever, striding along

as fast as cassock and cloak would let him, his eyes on the ground, and his wideawake drawn over them. He and Elsmere had scarcely met for months, and Robert had lately made up his mind that Newcome was distinctly less friendly, and wished to show it.

Elsmere had touched his arm before Newcome had perceived any one near him. Then he drew back with a start.

'Elsmere, you here! I had an idea you were away for a holiday!'

'Oh dear, no!' said Robert, smiling. 'I may get away in September, perhaps — not till then.'

'Mr. Wendover at home?' said the other, his eyes turning to the Hall, of which the chimneys were just visible from where they stood.

'No, he is abroad.'

'You and he have made friends, I understand,' said the other abruptly, his eagle look returning to Elsmere; 'I hear of you as always together.'

'We have made friends, and we walk a great deal when the squire is here,' said Robert, meeting Newcome's harshness of tone with a bright dignity. 'Mr. Wendover has even been doing something for us in the village. You should come and see the new Institute. The roof is on, and we shall open it in August or September. The best building of the kind in the country by far, and Mr. Wendover's gift.'

'I suppose you use the library a great deal?' said Newcome, paying no attention to these remarks, and still eyeing his companion closely.

'A great deal.'

Robert had at that moment under his arm a Ger-

man treatise on the history of the Logos doctrine, which afterwards, looking back on the little scene, he thought it probable Newcome recognised. They turned towards the rectory together, Newcome still asking abrupt questions as to the squire, the length of time he was to be away, Elsmere's work, parochial and literary, during the past six months, the numbers of his Sunday congregation, of his communicants, etc. Elsmere bore his catechism with perfect temper, though Newcome's manner had in it a strange and almost judicial imperativeness.

'Elsmere,' said his questioner presently, after a pause, 'I am going to have a retreat for priests at the Clergy House next month. Father H——,' mentioning a famous High Churchman, 'will conduct it. You would do me a special favour' — and suddenly the face softened, and shone with all its old magnetism on Elsmere — 'if you would come. I believe you would find nothing to dislike in it, or in our rule, which is a most simple one.'

Robert smiled, and laid his hand on the other's arm.

'No, Newcome, no; I am in no mood for H——.'

The High Churchman looked at him with a quick and painful anxiety visible in the stern eyes.

'Will you tell me what that means?'

'It means,' said Robert, clasping his hands tightly behind him, his pace slacking a little to meet that of Newcome — 'it means that if you will give me your prayers, Newcome, your companionship sometimes, your pity always, I will thank you from the bottom of my heart. But I am in a state just now when I

must fight my battles for myself, and in God's sight only!'

It was the first burst of confidence which had passed his lips to any one but Catherine.

Newcome stood still, a tremor of strong emotion running through the emaciated face.

'You are in trouble, Elsmere; I felt it, I knew it, when I first saw you!'

'Yes, I am in trouble,' said Robert quietly.

'Opinions?'

'Opinions, I suppose — or facts,' said Robert, his arms dropping wearily beside him. 'Have you ever known what it is to be troubled in mind, I wonder, Newcome?'

And he looked at his companion with a sudden pitiful curiosity.

A kind of flash passed over Mr. Newcome's face.

'*Have I ever known?*' he repeated vaguely, and then he drew his thin hand, the hand of the ascetic and the mystic, hastily across his eyes, and was silent — his lips moving, his gaze on the ground, his whole aspect that of a man wrought out of himself by a sudden passion of memory.

Robert watched him with surprise, and was just speaking, when Mr. Newcome looked up, every drawn attenuated feature working painfully.

'Did you never ask yourself, Elsmere,' he said slowly, 'what it was drove me from the bar and journalism to the East End? Do you think I don't know,' and his voice rose, his eyes flamed, 'what black devil it is that is gnawing at your heart now? Why, man, I have been through darker gulfs of hell than you

have ever sounded! Many a night I have felt myself *mad — mad of doubt* — a castaway on a shoreless sea; doubting not only God or Christ, but myself, the soul, the very existence of good. I found only one way out of it, and *you* will find only one way.'

The lithe hand caught Robert's arm impetuously — the voice with its accent of fierce conviction was at his ear.

'Trample on yourself! Pray down the demon, fast, scourge, kill the body, that the soul may live! What are we, miserable worms, that we should defy the Most High, that we should set our wretched faculties against His Omnipotence? Submit — submit — humble yourself, my brother! Fling away the freedom which is your ruin. There is no freedom for man. Either a slave to Christ, or a slave to his own lusts — there is no other choice. Go away; exchange your work here for a time for work in London. You have too much leisure here: Satan has too much opportunity. I foresaw it — I foresaw it when you and I first met. I felt I had a message for you, and here I deliver it. In the Lord's name, I bid you fly; I bid you yield in time. Better to be the Lord's captive than *the Lord's betrayer!*'

The wasted form was drawn up to its full height, the arm was outstretched, the long cloak fell back from it in long folds — voice and eye were majesty itself. Robert had a tremor of responsive passion. How easy it sounded, how tempting, to cut the knot, to mutilate and starve the rebellious intellect which would assert itself against the soul's purest instincts! Newcome had done it — why not he?

And then, suddenly, as he stood gazing at his companion, the spring sun, and murmur all about them, another face, another life, another message, flashed on his inmost sense — the face and life of Henry Grey. Words torn from their context, but full for him of intensest meaning, passed rapidly through his mind: '*God is not wisely trusted when declared unintelligible.*' '*Such honour rooted in dishonour stands; such faith unfaithful makes us falsely true.*' '*God is for ever reason: and His communication, His revelation, is reason.*'

He turned away with a slight sad shake of the head. The spell was broken. Mr. Newcome's arm dropped, and he moved sombrely on beside Robert — the hand, which held a little book of Hours against his cloak, trembling slightly.

At the rectory gate he stopped.

'Good-bye — I must go home.'

'You won't come in? — No, no, Newcome; believe me, I am no rash careless egotist, risking wantonly the most precious things in life! But the call is on me, and I must follow it. All life is God's, and all thought — not only a fraction of it. He cannot let me wander very far!'

But the cold fingers he held so warmly dropped from his, and Newcome turned away.

A week afterwards, or thereabouts, Robert had in some sense followed Newcome's counsel. Admonished perhaps by sheer physical weakness, as much as by anything else, he had for the moment laid down his arms; he had yielded to an invading feebleness of the will, which refused, as it were, to carry on the struggle any longer, at such a life-destroying pitch

of intensity. The intellectual oppression of itself brought about wild reaction and recoil, and a passionate appeal to that inward witness of the soul which holds its own long after the reason has practically ceased to struggle.

It came about in this way. One morning he stood reading in the window of the library the last of the squire's letters. It contained a short but masterly analysis of the mental habits and idiosyncrasies of St. Paul, *à propos* of St. Paul's witness to the Resurrection. Every now and then, as Elsmere turned the pages, the orthodox protest would assert itself, the orthodox arguments make themselves felt as though in mechanical involuntary protest. But their force and vitality was gone. Between the Paul of Anglican theology and the fiery fallible man of genius — so weak logically, so strong in poetry, in rhetoric, in moral passion, whose portrait has been drawn for us by a free and temperate criticism — the rector knew, in a sort of dull way, that his choice was made. The one picture carried reason and imagination with it; the other contented neither.

But as he put down the letter something seemed to snap within him. Some chord of physical endurance gave way. For five months he had been living intellectually at a speed no man maintains with impunity, and this letter of the squire's, with its imperious demands upon the tired irritable brain, was the last straw.

He sank down on the oriel seat, the letter dropping from his hands. Outside, the little garden, now a mass of red and pink roses, the hill and the distant

stretches of park were wrapped in a thick sultry mist, through which a dim far-off sunlight struggled on to the library floor, and lay in ghostly patches on the polished boards and lower ranges of books.

The simplest religious thoughts began to flow over him — the simplest childish words of prayer were on his lips. He felt himself delivered, he knew not how or why.

He rose deliberately, laid the squire's letter among his other papers, and tied them up carefully; then he took up the books which lay piled on the squire's writing-table: all those volumes of German, French, and English criticism, liberal or apologetic, which he had been accumulating round him day by day with a feverish toilsome impartiality, and began rapidly and methodically to put them back in their places on the shelves.

'I have done too much thinking, too much reading,' he was saying to himself as he went through his task. 'Now let it be the turn of something else!'

And still as he handled the books, it was as though Catherine's figure glided backwards and forwards beside him, across the smooth floor, as though her hand were on his arm, her eyes shining into his. Ah — he knew well what it was had made the sharpest sting of this wrestle through which he had been passing! It was not merely religious dread, religious shame; that terror of disloyalty to the Divine Images which has filled the soul's inmost shrine since its first entry into consciousness, such as every good man feels in a like strait. This had been strong indeed; but men are men, and love is love! Aye, it was to the dark

certainty of Catherine's misery that every advance in knowledge and intellectual power had brought him nearer. It was from that certainty that he now, and for the last time, recoiled. It was too much. It could not be borne.

He walked home, counting up the engagements of the next few weeks — the school-treat, two club field-days, a sermon in the county town, the probable opening of the new Workmen's Institute, and so on. Oh! to be through them all and away, away amid Alpine scents and silences. He stood a moment beside the grey slowly-moving river, half-hidden beneath the rank flower-growth, the tansy and willow-herb, the luxuriant elder and trailing brambles of its August banks, and thought with hungry passion of the clean-swept Alpine pasture, the fir-woods, and the tameless mountain streams. In three weeks or less he and Catherine should be climbing the Jaman or the Dent du Midi. And till then he would want all his time for men and women. Books should hold him no more.

Catherine only put her arms round his neck in silence when he told her. The relief was too great for words. He, too, held her close, saying nothing. But that night, for the first time for weeks, Elsmere's wife slept in peace and woke without dread of the day before her.

# BOOK IV

## CRISIS

## CHAPTER XXVI

THE next fortnight was a time of truce. Elsmere neither read nor reasoned. He spent his days in the school, in the village, pottering about the Mile End cottages, or the new Institute — sometimes fishing, sometimes passing long summer hours on the commons with his club boys, hunting the ponds for caddises, newts, and water-beetles, peering into the furze-bushes for second broods, or watching the sand-martins in the gravel-pits, and trudging home at night in the midst of an escort of enthusiasts, all of them with pockets as full and miry as his own, to deposit the treasures of the day in the club-room. Once more the rector, though physically perhaps less ardent than of yore, was the life of the party, and a certain awe and strangeness which had developed in his boys' minds towards him, during the last few weeks, passed away.

It was curious that in these days he would neither sit nor walk alone if he could help it. Catherine or a stray parishioner was almost always with him. All the while, vaguely, in the depths of consciousness, there was the knowledge that behind this piece of quiet water on which his life was now sailing, there lay storm and darkness, and that in front loomed fresh possibilities of tempest. He knew, in a way, that it was a treacherous peace which had overtaken him.

And yet it was peace. The pressure exerted by the will had temporarily given way, and the deepest forces of the man's being had reasserted themselves. He could feel and love and pray again; and Catherine, seeing the old glow in the eyes, the old spring in the step, made the whole of life one thank-offering.

On the evening following that moment of reaction in the Murewell library, Robert had written to the squire. His letter had been practically a withdrawal from the correspondence.

'I find,' he wrote, 'that I have been spending too much time and energy lately on these critical matters. It seems to me that my work as a clergyman has suffered. Nor can I deny that your book and your letters have been to me a source of great trouble of mind.

'My heart is where it was, but my head is often confused. Let controversy rest a while. My wife says I want a holiday; I think so myself, and we are off in three weeks; not, however, I hope, before we have welcomed you home again, and got you to open the new Institute, which is already dazzling the eyes of the village by its size and splendour, and the white paint that Harris the builder has been lavishing upon it.'

Ten days later, rather earlier than was expected, the squire and Mrs. Darcy were at home again. Robert re-entered the great house the morning after their arrival with a strange reluctance. Its glow and magnificence, the warm perfumed air of the hall, brought back a sense of old oppressions, and he walked down the passage to the library with a sinking heart.

There he found the squire busy as usual with one of those fresh cargoes of books which always accompanied him on any homeward journey. He was more brown, more wrinkled, more shrunken; more full of force, of harsh epigram, of grim anecdote than ever. Robert sat on the edge of the table laughing over his stories of French Orientalists, or Roman cardinals, or modern Greek professors, enjoying the impartial sarcasm which one of the greatest of *savants* was always ready to pour out upon his brethren of the craft.

The squire, however, was never genial for a moment during the interview. He did not mention his book nor Elsmere's letter. But Elsmere suspected in him a good deal of suppressed irritability; and, as after a while he abruptly ceased to talk, the visit grew difficult.

The rector walked home feeling restless and depressed. The mind had begun to work again. It was only by a great effort that he could turn his thoughts from the squire, and all that the squire had meant to him during the past year, and so woo back to himself 'the shy bird Peace.'

Mr. Wendover watched the door close behind him, and then went back to his work with a gesture of impatience.

'Once a priest, always a priest. What a fool I was to forget it! You think you make an impression on the mystic, and at the bottom there is always something which defies you and common sense. "Two and two do not, and shall not, make four,"' he said to himself, in a mincing voice of angry sarcasm. '"It

would give me too much pain that they should." Well, and so I suppose what might have been a rational friendship will go by the board like everything else. What can make the man shilly-shally in this way? He is convinced already, as he knows — those later letters were conclusive! His living, perhaps, and his work! Not for the money's sake — there never was a more incredibly disinterested person born. But his work? Well, who is to hinder his work? Will he be the first parson in the Church of England who looks after the poor and holds his tongue? If you can't speak your mind, it is something at any rate to possess one — nine tenths of the clergy being without the appendage. But Elsmere — pshaw! he will go muddling on to the end of the chapter!'

The squire, indeed, was like a hunter whose prey escapes him at the very moment of capture, and there grew on him a mocking aggressive mood which Elsmere often found hard to bear.

One natural symptom of it was his renewed churlishness as to all local matters. Elsmere one afternoon spent an hour in trying to persuade him to open the new Institute.

'What on earth do you want me for?' inquired Mr. Wendover, standing before the fire in the library, the Medusa head peering over his shoulder. 'You know perfectly well that all the gentry about here — I suppose you will have some of them — regard me as an old reprobate, and the poor people, I imagine, as a kind of ogre. To me it does n't matter a twopenny damn — I apologise; it was the Duke of Wellington's favourite standard of value — but I can't see

what good it can do either you or the village, under the circumstances, that I should stand on my head for the popular edification.'

Elsmere, however, merely stood his ground, arguing and bantering, till the squire grudgingly gave way. This time, after he departed, Mr. Wendover, instead of going to his work, still stood gloomily ruminating in front of the fire. His frowning eyes wandered round the great room before him. For the first time he was conscious that now, as soon as the charm of Elsmere's presence was withdrawn, his working hours were doubly solitary; that his loneliness weighed upon him more; and that it mattered to him appreciably whether that young man went or stayed. The stirring of a new sensation, however, — unparalleled since the brief days when even Roger Wendover had his friends and his attractions like other men, — was soon lost in renewed chafing at Elsmere's absurdities. The squire had been at first perfectly content — so he told himself — to limit the field of their intercourse, and would have been content to go on doing so. But Elsmere himself had invited freedom of speech between them.

'I would have given him my best,' Mr. Wendover reflected impatiently. 'I could have handed on to him all I shall never use, and he might use, admirably. And now we might as well be on the terms we were to begin with for all the good I get out of him, or he out of me. Clearly nothing but cowardice! He cannot face the intellectual change, and he must, I suppose, dread lest it should affect his work. Good God, what nonsense! As if any one inquired what an Eng-

lish parson believed nowadays, so long as he performs all the usual antics decently!'

And, meanwhile, it never occurred to the squire that Elsmere had a wife, and a pious one. Catherine had been dropped out of his calculation as to Elsmere's future, at a very early stage.

The following afternoon Robert, coming home from a round, found Catherine out, and a note awaiting him from the Hall.

'Can you and Mrs. Elsmere come in to tea?' wrote the squire. 'Madame de Netteville is here, and one or two others.'

Robert grumbled a good deal, looked for Catherine to devise an excuse for him, could not find her, and at last reluctantly set out again alone.

He was tired and his mood was heavy. As he trudged through the park he never once noticed the soft sun-flooded distance, the shining loops of the river, the feeding deer, or any of those natural witcheries to which eye and sense were generally so responsive. The labourers going home, the children — with aprons full of crab-apples, and lips dyed by the first blackberries — who passed him, got but an absent smile or salute from the rector. The interval of exaltation and recoil was over. The ship of the mind was once more labouring in alien and dreary seas.

He roused himself to remember that he had been curious to see Madame de Netteville. She was an old friend of the squire's, the holder of a London salon, much more exquisite and select than anything Lady Charlotte could show.

'She had the same thing in Paris before the war,' the squire explained. 'Renan gave me a card to her. An extraordinary woman. No particular originality; but one of the best persons "to consult about ideas," like Joubert's Madame de Beaumont, I ever saw. Receptiveness itself. A beauty, too, or was one, and a bit of a sphinx, which adds to the attraction. Mystery becomes a woman vastly. One suspects her of adventures just enough to find her society doubly piquant.'

Vincent directed him to the upper terrace, whither tea had been taken. This terrace, which was one of the features of Murewell, occupied the top of the yew-clothed hill on which the library looked out. Evelyn himself had planned it. Along its upper side ran one of the most beautiful of old walls, broken by niches and statues, tapestried with roses and honeysuckle, and opening in the centre to reveal Evelyn's darling conceit of all — a semicircular space, holding a fountain, and leading to a grotto. The grotto had been scooped out of the hill; it was peopled with dim figures of fauns and nymphs who showed white amid its moist greenery; and in front a marble Silence drooped over the fountain, which held gold and silver fish in a singularly clear water. Outside ran the long stretch of level turf, edged with a jewelled rim of flowers; and as the hill fell steeply underneath, the terrace was like a high green platform raised into air, in order that a Wendover might see his domain, which from thence lay for miles spread out before him.

Here, beside the fountain, were gathered the squire, Mrs. Darcy, Madame de Netteville, and two unknown

men. One of them was introduced to Elsmere as Mr. Spooner, and recognised by him as a Fellow of the Royal Society, a famous mathematician, sceptic, *bon vivant*, and sayer of good things. The other was a young Liberal Catholic, the author of a remarkable collection of essays on mediæval subjects in which the squire, treating the man's opinions of course as of no account, had instantly recognised the note of the true scholar. A pale, small, hectic creature, possessed of that restless energy of mind which often goes with the heightened temperature of consumption.

Robert took a seat by Madame de Netteville, whose appearance was picturesqueness itself. Her dress, a skilful mixture of black and creamy yellow, lay about her in folds, as soft, as carelessly effective as her manner. Her plumed hat shadowed a face which was no longer young in such a way as to hide all the lines possible; while the half-light brought admirably out the rich dark smoothness of the tints, the black lustre of the eyes. A delicate blue-veined hand lay upon her knee, and Robert was conscious after ten minutes or so that all her movements, which seemed at first merely slow and languid, were in reality singularly full of decision and purpose. She was not easy to talk to on a first acquaintance. Robert felt that she was studying him, and was not so much at his ease as usual, partly owing to fatigue and mental worry.

She asked him little abrupt questions about the neighbourhood, his parish, his work, in a soft tone which had, however, a distinct aloofness, even *hauteur*. His answers, on the other hand, were often a trifle reckless and offhand. He was in a mood to be impa-

tient with a *mondaine's* languid inquiries into clerical work, and it seemed to him the squire's description had been overdone.

'So you try to civilise your peasants,' she said at last. 'Does it succeed — is it worth while?'

'That depends upon your general ideas of what is worth while,' he answered smiling.

'Oh, everything is worth while that passes the time,' she said hurriedly. 'The clergy of the old *régime* went through life half asleep. That was their way of passing it. Your way, being a modern, is to bustle and try experiments.'

Her eyes, half-closed but none the less provocative, ran over Elsmere's keen face and pliant frame. An atmosphere of intellectual and social assumption enwrapped her, which annoyed Robert in much the same way as Langham's philosophical airs were wont to do. He was drawn without knowing it into a match of wits wherein his strokes, if they lacked the finish and subtlety of hers, showed certainly no lack of sharpness or mental resource. Madame de Netteville's tone insensibly changed, her manner quickened, her great eyes gradually unclosed.

Suddenly, as they were in the middle of a skirmish as to the reality of influence, Madame de Netteville paradoxically maintaining that no human being had ever really converted, transformed, or convinced another, the voice of young Wishart, shrill and tremulous, rose above the general level of talk.

'I am quite ready; I am not the least afraid of a definition. Theology is organised knowledge in the field of religion, a science like any other science.'

'Certainly, my dear sir, certainly,' said Mr. Spooner, leaning forward with his hands round his knees, and speaking with the most elegant and good-humoured *sang-froid* imaginable, 'the science of the world's ghosts! I cannot imagine any more fascinating.'

'Well,' said Madame de Netteville to Robert, with a deep breath, '*that* was a remark to have hurled at you all at once out of doors on a summer's afternoon! Oh, Mr. Spooner!' she said, raising her voice, 'don't play the heretic here! There is no fun in it; there are too many with you.'

'I did not begin it, my dear madam, and your reproach is unjust. On one side of me Archbishop Manning's *fidus Achates*,' and the speaker took off his large straw hat and gracefully waved it — first to the right, then to the left. 'On the other, the rector of the parish. "Cannon to right of me, cannon to left of me." I submit my courage is unimpeachable!'

He spoke with a smiling courtesy as excessive as his silky moustache, his long straw-coloured beard, and his Panama hat. Madame de Netteville surveyed him with cool critical eyes. Robert smiled slightly, acknowledged the bow, but did not speak.

Mr. Wishart evidently took no heed of anything but his own thoughts. He sat bolt upright with shining excited eyes.

'Ah, I remember that article of yours in the *Fortnightly!* How you sceptics miss the point!'

And out came a stream of argument and denunciation which had probably lain lava-hot at the heart of the young convert for years, waiting for such a moment as this, when he had before him at close quar-

ters two of the most famous antagonists of his faith. The outburst was striking, but certainly unpardonably ill-timed. Madame de Netteville retreated into herself with a shrug. Robert, in whom a sore nerve had been set jarring, did his utmost to begin his talk with her again.

In vain! — for the squire struck in. He had been sitting huddled together — his cynical eyes wandering from Wishart to Elsmere — when suddenly some extravagant remark of the young Catholic, and Robert's effort to edge away from the conversation, caught his attention at the same moment. His face hardened, and in his nasal voice he dealt a swift epigram at Mr. Wishart, which for the moment left the young disputant floundering.

But only for the moment. In another minute or two the argument, begun so casually, had developed into a serious trial of strength, in which the squire and young Wishart took the chief parts, while Mr. Spooner threw in a laugh and a sarcasm here and there.

And as long as Mr. Wendover talked, Madame de Netteville listened. Robert's restless repulsion to the whole incident, his passionate wish to escape from these phrases and illustrations and turns of argument, which were all so wearisomely stale and familiar to him, found no support in her. Mrs. Darcy dared not second his attempts at chat, for Mr. Wendover, on the rare occasions when he held forth, was accustomed to be listened to; and Elsmere was of too sensitive a social fibre to break up the party by an abrupt exit, which could only have been interpreted in one way.

So he stayed, and perforce listened, but in com-

plete silence. None of Mr. Wendover's side-hits touched him. Only as the talk went on, the rector in the background got paler and paler; his eyes, as they passed from the mobile face of the Catholic convert, already, for those who knew, marked with the signs of death, to the bronzed visage of the squire, grew duller — more instinct with a slowly-dawning despair.

Half an hour later he was once more on the road leading to the park gate. He had a vague memory that at parting the squire had shown him the cordiality of one suddenly anxious to apologise by manner, if not by word. Otherwise everything was forgotten. He was only anxious, half-dazed as he was, to make out wherein lay the vital difference between his present self and the Elsmere who had passed along that road an hour before.

He had heard a conversation on religious topics, wherein nothing was new to him, nothing affected him intellectually at all. What was there in that to break the spring of life like this? He stood still, heavily trying to understand himself.

Then gradually it became clear to him. A month ago, every word of that hectic young pleader for Christ and the Christian certainties would have roused in him a leaping passionate sympathy — the heart's yearning assent, even when the intellect was most perplexed. Now that inmost strand had given way. Suddenly the disintegrating force he had been so pitifully, so blindly, holding at bay had penetrated once for all into the sanctuary! What had happened to him had been the first real failure of *feeling*, the first

*Wendover Park*

treachery of the *heart*. Wishart's hopes and hatreds, and sublime defiances of man's petty faculties, had aroused in him no echo, no response. His soul had been dead within him.

As he gained the shelter of the wooded lane beyond the gate it seemed to Robert that he was going through once more that old fierce temptation of Bunyan's, —

'For after the Lord had in this manner thus graciously delivered me, and had set me down so sweetly in the faith of His Holy Gospel, and had given me such strong consolation and blessed evidence from heaven, touching my interest in His love through Christ, the tempter came upon me again, and that with a more grievous and dreadful temptation than before. And that was, "To sell and part with this most blessed Christ; to exchange Him for the things of life, for anything!" The temptation lay upon me for the space of a year, and did follow me so continually that I was not rid of it one day in a month; no, not sometimes one hour in many days together, for it did always, in almost whatever I thought, intermix itself therewith, in such sort that I could neither eat my food, stoop for a pin, chop a stick, or cast mine eyes to look on this or that, but still the temptation would come: "Sell Christ for this, or sell Christ for that, sell Him, sell Him!"'

Was this what lay before the minister of God now in this *selva oscura* of life? The selling of the Master, of 'the love so sweet, the unction spiritual,' for an intellectual satisfaction, the ravaging of all the fair places of the heart by an intellectual need!

And still through all the despair, all the revolt, all

the pain, which made the summer air a darkness, and closed every sense in him to the evening beauty, he felt the irresistible march and pressure of the new instincts, the new forces, which life and thought had been calling into being. The words of St. Augustine which he had read to Catherine, taken in a strange new sense, came back to him — 'Commend to the keeping of the Truth whatever the Truth hath given thee, and thou shalt lose nothing!'

Was it the summons of Truth which was rending the whole nature in this way?

Robert stood still, and with his hands locked behind him, and his face turned like the face of a blind man towards a world of which it saw nothing, went through a desperate catechism of himself.

'*Do I believe in God?* Surely, surely! "Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him!" *Do I believe in Christ?* Yes, — in the teacher, the martyr, the symbol to us Westerns of all things heavenly and abiding, the image and pledge of the invisible life of the spirit, — with all my soul and all my mind!

'*But in the Man-God*, the Word from Eternity, — in a wonder-working Christ, in a risen and ascended Jesus, in the living Intercessor and Mediator for the lives of His doomed brethren?'

He waited, conscious that it was the crisis of his history, and there rose in him, as though articulated one by one by an audible voice, words of irrevocable meaning.

'Every human soul, in which the voice of God makes itself felt, enjoys, equally with Jesus of Nazareth, the divine sonship, and "*miracles do not happen!*"'

It was done. He felt for the moment as Bunyan did after his lesser defeat.

'Now was the battle won, and down fell I as a bird that is shot from the top of a tree into great guilt and fearful despair. Thus getting out of my bed I went moping in the field; but God knows with as heavy an heart as mortal man I think could bear, where for the space of two hours I was like a man bereft of life.'

All these years of happy spiritual certainty, of rejoicing oneness with Christ, to end in this wreck and loss! Was not this indeed '*il gran rifiuto*' — the greatest of which human daring is capable? The lane darkened round him. Not a soul was in sight. The only sounds were the sounds of a gently-breathing Nature, sounds of birds and swaying branches and intermittent gusts of air rustling through the gorse and the drifts of last year's leaves in the wood beside him. He moved mechanically onward, and presently, after the first flutter of desolate terror had passed away, with a new inrushing sense which seemed to him a sense of liberty — of infinite expansion.

Suddenly the trees before him thinned, the ground sloped away, and there to the left on the westernmost edge of the hill lay the square stone rectory, its windows open to the evening coolness, a white flutter of pigeons round the dovecote on the side lawn, the gold of the August wheat in the great cornfield showing against the heavy girdle of oak-wood.

Robert stood gazing at it — the home consecrated by love, by effort, by faith. The high alternations of intellectual and spiritual debate, the strange emerging

sense of deliverance, gave way to a most bitter human pang of misery.

*'O God! My wife — my work!'*

. . . There was a sound of a voice calling — Catherine's voice calling for him. He leant against the gate of the wood-path, struggling sternly with himself. This was no simple matter of his own intellectual consistency or happiness. Another's whole life was concerned. Any precipitate speech, or hasty action, would be a crime. A man is bound above all things to protect those who depend on him from his own immature or revocable impulses. Not a word yet, till this sense of convulsion and upheaval had passed away, and the mind was once more its own master.

He opened the gate and went towards her. She was strolling along the path looking out for him, one delicate hand gathering up her long evening dress — that very same black brocade she had worn in the old days at Burwood — the other playing with their Dandie Dinmont puppy who was leaping beside her. As she caught sight of him, there was the flashing smile, the hurrying step. And he felt he could but just drag himself to meet her.

'Robert, how long you have been! I thought you must have stayed to dinner after all! And how tired you seem!'

'I had a long walk,' he said, catching her hand, as it slipped itself under his arm, and clinging to it as though to a support. 'And I am tired. There is no use whatever in denying it.'

His voice was light, but if it had not been so dark

she must have been startled by his face. As they went on towards the house, however, she scolding him for over-walking, he won his battle with himself. He went through the evening so that even Catherine's jealous eyes saw nothing but extra fatigue. In the most desperate straits of life love is still the fountain of all endurance, and if ever a man loved it was Robert Elsmere.

But that night, as he lay sleepless in their quiet room, with the window open to the stars and to the rising gusts of wind, which blew the petals of the cluster-rose outside in drifts of 'fair weather snow' on to the window-sill, he went through an agony which no words can adequately describe.

He must, of course, give up his living and his orders. His standards and judgements had always been simple and plain in these respects. In other men it might be right and possible that they should live on in the ministry of the Church, doing the humane and charitable work of the Church, while refusing assent to the intellectual and dogmatic framework on which the Church system rests; but for himself it would be neither right nor wrong, but simply impossible. He did not argue or reason about it. There was a favourite axiom of Mr. Grey's which had become part of his pupil's spiritual endowment, and which was perpetually present to him at this crisis of his life, in the spirit, if not in the letter — '*Conviction is the Conscience of the Mind.*' And with this intellectual conscience he was no more capable of trifling than with the moral conscience.

The night passed away. How the rare intermittent sounds impressed themselves upon him! — the stir

of the child's waking soon after midnight in the room overhead; the cry of the owls in the oak-wood; the purring of the night-jars on the common; the morning chatter of the swallows round the eaves.

With the first invasion of the dawn Robert raised himself and looked at Catherine. She was sleeping with that light sound sleep which belongs to health of body and mind, one hand under her face, the other stretched out in soft relaxation beside her. Her husband hung over her in a bewilderment of feeling. Before him passed all sorts of incoherent pictures of the future; the mind was caught by all manner of incongruous details in that saddest uprooting which lay before him. How her sleep, her ignorance, reproached him! He thought of the wreck of all her pure ambitions — for him, for their common work, for the people she had come to love; the ruin of her life of charity and tender usefulness, the darkening of all her hopes, the shaking of all her trust. Two years of devotion, of exquisite self-surrender, had brought her to this! It was for this he had lured her from the shelter of her hills, for this she had opened to him all her sweet stores of faith, all the deepest springs of her womanhood. Oh, how she must suffer! The thought of it and his own helplessness wrung his heart.

Oh, could he keep her love through it all? There was an unspeakable dread mingled with his grief — his remorse. It had been there for months. In her eyes would not only pain but *sin* divide them? Could he possibly prevent her whole relation to him from altering and dwindling?

It was to be the problem of his remaining life. With

a great cry of the soul to that God it yearned and felt for through all the darkness and ruin which encompassed it, he laid his hand on hers with the timidest passing touch.

'Catherine, I will make amends! My wife, I will make amends!'

## CHAPTER XXVII

THE next morning Catherine, finding that Robert still slept on after their usual waking time, and remembering his exhaustion of the night before, left him softly, and kept the house quiet that he might not be disturbed. She was in charge of the now toddling Mary in the dining-room when the door opened and Robert appeared.

At sight of him she sprang up with a half-cry; the face seemed to have lost all its fresh colour, its look of sun and air; the eyes were sunk; the lips and chin lined and drawn. It was like a face from which the youth had suddenly been struck out.

'Robert!' — but her question died on her lips.

'A bad night, darling, and a bad headache,' he said, groping his way, as it seemed to her, to the table, his hand leaning on her arm. 'Give me some breakfast.'

She restrained herself at once, put him into an armchair by the window, and cared for him in her tender noiseless way. But she had grown almost as pale as he, and her heart was like lead.

'Will you send me off for the day to Thurston ponds?' he said presently, trying to smile with lips so stiff and nerveless that the will had small control over them.

'Can you walk so far? You did overdo it yesterday, you know. You have never got over Mile End, Robert.'

But her voice had a note in it which in his weakness he could hardly bear. He thirsted to be alone again, to be able to think over quietly what was best for her — for them both. There must be a next step, and in her neighbourhood he was too feeble, too tortured, to decide upon it.

'No more, dear — no more,' he said impatiently, as she tried to feed him; then he added as he rose: 'Don't make arrangements for our going next week, Catherine; it can't be so soon.'

Catherine looked at him with eyes of utter dismay. The sustaining hope of all these difficult weeks, which had slipped with such terrible unexpectedness into their happy life, was swept away from her.

'Robert, you *ought* to go.'

'I have too many things to arrange,' he said sharply, almost irritably. Then his tone changed: 'Don't urge it, Catherine.'

His eyes in their weariness seemed to entreat her not to argue. She stooped and kissed him, her lips trembling.

'When do you want to go to Thurston?'

'As soon as possible. Can you find me my fishing-basket, and get me some sandwiches? I shall only lounge there and take it easy.'

She did everything for him that wifely hands could do. Then when his fishing-basket was strapped on, and his lunch was slipped into the capacious pocket of the well-worn shooting-coat, she threw her arms round him.

'Robert, you will come away *soon*.'

He roused himself and kissed her.

'I will,' he said simply, withdrawing, however, from her grasp, as though he could not bear those close pleading eyes. 'Good-bye! I shall be back some time in the afternoon.'

From her post beside the study window she watched him take the short cut across the cornfield. She was miserable, and all at sea. A week ago he had been so like himself again, and now—! Never had she seen him in anything like this state of physical and mental collapse.

'Oh, Robert,' she cried under her breath, with an abandonment like a child's, strong soul that she was, 'why *won't* you tell me, dear? Why won't you let me share? I might help you through — I might.'

She supposed he must be again in trouble of mind. A weaker woman would have implored, tormented, till she knew all. Catherine's very strength and delicacy of nature, and that respect which was inbred in her for the *sacra* of the inner life, stood in her way. She could not catechise him, and force his confidence on this subject of all others. It must be given freely. And oh! it was so long in coming!

Surely, surely, it must be mainly physical, the result of overstrain — expressing itself in characteristic mental worry, just as daily life reproduces itself in dreams. The worldly man suffers at such times through worldly things, the religious man through his religion. Comforting herself a little with thoughts of this kind, and with certain more or less vague preparations for departure, Catherine got through the morning as best she might.

Meanwhile, Robert was trudging along to Thurston under a sky which, after a few threatening showers, promised once more to be a sky of intense heat. He had with him all the tackle necessary for spooning pike, a sport the novelty and success of which had hugely commended it the year before to those Esau-like instincts Murewell had so much developed in him.

And now — oh the weariness of the August warmth, and the long stretches of sandy road! By the time he reached the ponds he was tired out; but instead of stopping at the largest of the three, where a picturesque group of old brick cottages brought a reminder of man and his works into the prairie solitude of the common, he pushed on to a smaller pool just beyond, now hidden in a green cloud of birch-wood. Here, after pushing his way through the closely-set trees, he made some futile attempts at fishing, only to put up his rod long before the morning was over and lay it beside him on the bank. And there he sat for hours, vaguely watching the reflexion of the clouds, the gambols and quarrels of the waterfowl, the ways of the birds, the alternations of sun and shadow on the softly-moving trees, — the real self of him passing all the while through an interminable inward drama, starting from the past, stretching to the future, steeped in passion, in pity, in regret.

He thought of the feelings with which he had taken orders, of Oxford scenes and Oxford persons, of the efforts, the pains, the successes of his first year at Murewell. What a ghastly mistake it had all been! He felt a kind of sore contempt for himself, for his

own lack of prescience, of self-knowledge. His life looked to him so shallow and worthless. How does a man ever retrieve such a false step? He groaned aloud as he thought of Catherine linked to one born to defeat her hopes, and all that natural pride that a woman feels in the strength and consistency of the man she loves. As he sat there by the water he touched the depths of self-humiliation.

As to religious belief, everything was a chaos. What might be to him the ultimate forms and condition of thought, the tired mind was quite incapable of divining. To every stage in the process of destruction it was feverishly alive. But its formative energy was for the moment gone. The foundations were swept away, and everything must be built up afresh. Only the *habit* of faith held, the close instinctive clinging to a Power beyond sense — a Goodness, a Will, not man's. The soul had been stripped of its old defences, but at his worst there was never a moment when Elsmere felt himself *utterly* forsaken.

But his people — his work! Every now and then into the fragmentary debate still going on within him there would flash little pictures of Murewell. The green, with the sun on the house-fronts, the awning over the village shop, the vane on the old 'Manor-house,' the familiar figures at the doors; his church, with every figure in the Sunday congregation as clear to him as though he were that moment in the pulpit; the children he had taught, the sick he had nursed, this or that weather-beaten or brutalised peasant whose history he knew, whose tragic secrets he had learnt, — all these memories and images

clung about him as though with ghostly hands, asking, 'Why will you desert us? You are ours — stay with us!'

Then his thoughts would run over the future, dwelling, with a tense realistic sharpness, on every detail which lay before him — the arrangements with his *locum tenens*, the interview with the bishop, the parting with the rectory. It even occurred to him to wonder what must be done with Martha and his mother's cottage.

His mother? As he thought of her a wave of unutterable longing rose and broke. The difficult tears stood in his eyes. He had a strange conviction that at this crisis of his life she of *all* human beings would have understood him best.

When would the squire know? He pictured the interview with him, divining, with the same abnormal clearness of inward vision, Mr. Wendover's start of mingled triumph and impatience — triumph in the new recruit, impatience with the Quixotic folly which could lead a man to look upon orthodox dogma as a thing real enough to be publicly renounced, or clerical pledges as more than a form of words. So henceforth he was on the same side with the squire, held by an indiscriminating world as bound to the same negations, the same hostilities! The thought roused in him a sudden fierceness of moral repugnance. The squire and Edward Langham — they were the only sceptics of whom he had ever had close and personal experience. And with all his old affection for Langham, all his frank sense of pliancy in the squire's hands, yet in this strait of life how he shrinks from

them both! — souls at war with life and man, without holiness, without perfume!

Is it the law of things? 'Once loosen a man's *religio,* once fling away the old binding elements, the old traditional restraints which have made him what he is, and moral deterioration is certain.' How often he has heard it said! How often he has endorsed it! Is it true? His heart grows cold within him. What good man can ever contemplate with patience the loss, not of friends or happiness, but of his best self? What shall it profit a man, indeed, if he gain the whole world — the whole world of knowledge and speculation — and *lose his own soul?*

And then, for his endless comfort, there rose on the inward eye the vision of an Oxford lecture-room, of a short sturdy figure, of a great brow over honest eyes, of words alive with moral passion, of thought instinct with the beauty of holiness. Thank God for the saint in Henry Grey! Thinking of it, Robert felt his own self-respect re-born.

Oh! to see Grey in the flesh, to get his advice, his approval! Even though it was the depths of vacation, Grey was so closely connected with the town, as distinguished from the university, life of Oxford, it might be quite possible to find him at home. Elsmere suddenly determined to find out at once if he could be seen.

And if so, he would go over to Oxford at once. *This* should be the next step, and he would say nothing to Catherine till afterwards. He felt himself so dull, so weary, so resourceless. Grey should help and counsel him, should send him back with a clearer

brain — a quicker ingenuity of love, better furnished against her pain and his own.

Then everything else was forgotten; and he thought of nothing but that grisly moment of waking in the empty room, when still believing it night, he had put out his hand for his wife, and with a superstitious pang had felt himself alone. His heart torn with a hundred inarticulate cries of memory and grief, he sat on beside the water, unconscious of the passing of time, his grey eyes staring sightlessly at the wood-pigeons as they flew past him, at the occasional flash of a kingfisher, at the moving panorama of summer clouds above the trees opposite.

At last he was startled back to consciousness by the fall of a few heavy drops of warm rain. He looked at his watch. It was nearly four o'clock. He rose, stiff and cramped with sitting, and at the same instant he saw beyond the birch-wood on the open stretch of common a boy's figure, which, after a step or two, he recognised as Ned Irwin.

'You here, Ned?' he said, stopping, the pastoral temper in him reasserting itself at once. 'Why are n't you harvesting?'

'Please, sir, I finished with the Hall medders yesterday, and Mr. Carter's job don't begin till to-morrow. He's got a machine coming from Witley, he hev, and they won't let him have it till Thursday, so I've been out after things for the club.'

And opening the tin box strapped on his back, he showed the day's capture of butterflies, and some belated birds' eggs, the plunder of a bit of common where the turf for the winter's burning was just being cut.

'Goatsucker, linnet, stonechat,' said the rector, fingering them. 'Well done for August, Ned. If you have n't got anything better to do with them, give them to that small boy of Mr. Carter's that's been ill so long. He'd thank you for them, I know.'

The lad nodded with a guttural sound of assent. Then his new-born scientific ardour seemed to struggle with his rustic costiveness of speech.

'I've just been watching a queer creetur,' he said at last hurriedly; 'I b'leeve he's that un.'

And he pulled out a well-thumbed handbook, and pointed to a cut of the grasshopper warbler.

'Whereabouts?' asked Robert, wondering the while at his own start of interest.

'In that bit of common t' other side the big pond,' said Ned, pointing, his brick-red countenance kindling into suppressed excitement.

'Come and show me!' said the rector, and the two went off together. And sure enough, after a little beating about, they heard the note which had roused the lad's curiosity, the loud whirr of a creature that should have been a grasshopper, and was not.

They stalked the bird a few yards, stooping and crouching, Robert's eager hand on the boy's arm, whenever the clumsy rustic movements made too much noise among the underwood. They watched it uttering its jarring imitative note on bush after bush, just dropping to the ground as they came near, and flitting a yard or two farther, but otherwise showing no sign of alarm at their presence. Then suddenly the impulse which had been leading him on died in the rector. He stood upright, with a long sigh.

'I must go home, Ned,' he said abruptly. 'Where are you off to?'

'Please, sir, there's my sister at the cottage, her as married Jim, the under-keeper. I be going there for my tea.'

'Come along, then, we can go together.'

They trudged along in silence; presently Robert turned on his companion.

'Ned, this natural history has been a fine thing for you, my lad; mind you stick to it. That and good work will make a man of you. When I go away —'

The boy started and stopped dead, his dumb animal eyes fixed on his companion.

'You know I shall soon be going off on my holiday,' said Robert, smiling faintly; adding hurriedly as the boy's face resumed its ordinary expression: 'But some day, Ned, I shall go for good. I don't know whether you've been depending on me — you and some of the others. I think perhaps you have. If so, don't depend on me, Ned, any more! It must all come to an end — everything must — *everything!* — except the struggle to be a man in the world, and not a beast — to make one's heart clean and soft, and not hard and vile. That is the *one* thing that matters, and lasts. Ah, never forget that, Ned! Never forget it!'

He stood still, towering over the slouching thick-set form beside him, his pale intensity of look giving a rare dignity and beauty to the face which owed so little of its attractiveness to comeliness of feature. He had the makings of a true shepherd of men, and his mind as he spoke was crossed by a hundred different currents of feeling — bitterness, pain, and yearning unspeakable.

No man could feel the wrench that lay before him more than he.

Ned Irwin said not a word. His heavy lids were dropped over his deep-set eye; he stood motionless, nervously fiddling with his butterfly net—awkwardness, and, as it seemed, irresponsiveness, in his whole attitude.

Robert gathered himself together.

'Well, good-night, my lad,' he said with a change of tone. 'Good luck to you; be off to your tea!'

And he turned away, striding swiftly over the short burnt August grass in the direction of the Murewell woods, which rose in a blue haze of heat against the slumberous afternoon sky. He had not gone a hundred yards before he heard a clattering after him. He stopped, and Ned came up with him.

'They're heavy, them things,' said the boy, desperately blurting it out, and pointing, with heaving chest and panting breath, to the rod and basket. 'I am going that way, I can leave un at the rectory.'

Robert's eyes gleamed.

'They are no weight, Ned — 'cause why? I've been lazy and caught no fish! But there,' — after a moment's hesitation he slipped off the basket and rod, and put them into the begrimed hands held out for them. 'Bring them when you like; I don't know when I shall want them again. Thank you, and God bless you!'

The boy was off with his booty in a second.

'Perhaps he'll like to think he did it for me, by and by,' said Robert sadly to himself, moving on, a little moisture in the clear grey eye.

About three o'clock next day Robert was in Oxford. The night before he had telegraphed to ask if Grey was at home. The reply had been — 'Here for a week on way north; come by all means.' Oh! that look of Catherine's when he had told her of his plan, trying in vain to make it look merely casual and ordinary.

'It is more than a year since I have set eyes on Grey, Catherine. And the day's change would be a boon. I could stay the night at Merton, and get home early next day.'

But as he turned a pleading look to her, he had been startled by the sudden rigidity of face and form. Her silence had in it an intense, almost a haughty, reproach, which she was too keenly hurt to put into words.

He caught her by the arm, and drew her forcibly to him. There he made her look into the eyes which were full of nothing but the most passionate imploring affection.

'Have patience a little more, Catherine!' he just murmured. 'Oh, how I have blessed you for silence! Only till I come back!'

'Till you come back,' she repeated slowly. 'I cannot bear it any longer, Robert, that you should give others your confidence, and not me.'

He groaned and let her go. No—there should be but one day more of silence, and that day was interposed for her sake. If Grey from his calmer standpoint bade him wait and test himself, before taking any irrevocable step, he would obey him. And if so, the worst pang of all need not yet be inflicted on Catherine, though as to his state of mind he would be perfectly open with her.

A few hours later his cab deposited him at the well-known door. It seemed to him that he and the scorched plane-trees lining the sides of the road were the only living things in the wide sun-beaten street.

Every house was shut up. Only the Greys' open windows, amid their shuttered neighbours, had a friendly human air.

Yes; Mr. Grey was in, and expecting Mr. Elsmere. Robert climbed the dim familiar staircase, his heart beating fast.

'Elsmere, this *is* a piece of good fortune!'

And the two men, after a grasp of the hand, stood fronting each other; Mr. Grey, a light of pleasure on the rugged dark-complexioned face, looking up at his taller and paler visitor.

But Robert could find nothing to say in return; and in an instant Mr. Grey's quick eye detected the strained nervous emotion of the man before him.

'Come and sit down, Elsmere — there, in the window, where we can talk. One has to live on this east side of the house this weather.'

'In the first place,' said Mr. Grey, scrutinising him, as he returned to his own book-littered corner of the window-seat, — 'in the first place, my dear fellow, I can't congratulate you on your appearance. I never saw a man look in worse condition — to be up and about.'

'That's nothing!' said Robert, almost impatiently, 'I want a holiday, I believe. Grey!' and he looked nervously out over garden and apple-trees, 'I have come — very selfishly — to ask your advice; to throw a trouble upon you, to claim all your friendship can give me.'

He stopped. Mr. Grey was silent — his expression changing instantly, the bright eyes profoundly, anxiously attentive.

'I have just come to the conclusion,' said Robert, after a moment, with quick abruptness, 'that I ought now — at this moment — to leave the Church, and give up my living, for reasons which I will describe to you. But before I act on the conclusion, I wanted the light of your mind upon it, seeing that — that — other persons than myself are concerned.'

'Give up your living!' echoed Mr. Grey in a low voice of astonishment. He sat looking at the face and figure of the man before him with a half-frowning expression. How often Robert had seen some rash exuberant youth quelled by that momentary frown! Essentially conservative as was the inmost nature of the man, for all his radicalism there were few things for which Henry Grey felt more instinctive distaste than for unsteadiness of will and purpose, however glorified by fine names. Robert knew it, and, strangely enough, felt for a moment in the presence of the heretical tutor as a culprit before a judge.

'It is, of course, a matter of opinions,' he said, with an effort. 'Do you remember, before I took orders, asking whether I had ever had difficulties, and I told you that I had probably never gone deep enough. It was profoundly true, though I did n't really mean it. But this year — No, no, I have not been merely vain and hasty! I may be a shallow creature, but it has been natural growth, not wantonness.'

And at last his eyes met Mr. Grey's firmly, almost with solemnity. It was as if in the last few moments

he had been instinctively testing the quality of his own conduct and motives by the touchstone of the rare personality beside him; and they had stood the trial. There was such pain, such sincerity, above all such freedom from littleness of soul implied in words and look, that Mr. Grey quickly held out his hand. Robert grasped it, and felt that the way was clear before him.

'Will you give me an account of it?' said Mr. Grey, and his tone was grave sympathy itself. 'Or would you rather confine yourself to generalities and accomplished facts?'

'I will try and give you an account of it,' said Robert; and sitting there with his elbows on his knees, his gaze fixed on the yellowing afternoon sky, and the intricacies of the garden-walls between them and the new Museum, he went through the history of the last two years. He described the beginnings of his historical work, the gradual enlargement of the mind's horizons, and the intrusion within them of question after question, and subject after subject. Then he mentioned the squire's name.

'Ah!' exclaimed Mr. Grey, 'I had forgotten you were that man's neighbour. I wonder he did n't set you against the whole business, inhuman old cynic!'

He spoke with the strong dislike of the idealist, devoted in practice to an everyday ministry to human need, for the intellectual egotist. Robert caught and relished the old pugnacious flash in the eye, the Midland strength of accent.

'Cynic he is, not altogether inhuman, I think. I fought him about his drains and his cottages, however,' — and he smiled sadly, — 'before I began to

read his books. But the man's genius is incontestable, his learning enormous. He found me in a susceptible state, and I recognise that his influence immensely accelerated a process already begun.'

Mr. Grey was struck with the simplicity and fulness of the avowal. A lesser man would hardly have made it in the same way. Rising to pace up and down the room—the familiar action recalling vividly to Robert the Sunday afternoons of bygone years—he began to put questions with a clearness and decision that made them so many guides to the man answering, through the tangle of his own recollections.

'I see,' said the tutor at last, his hands in the pockets of his short grey coat, his brow bent and thoughtful. 'Well, the process in you has been the typical process of the present day. Abstract thought has had little or nothing to say to it. It has been all a question of literary and historical evidence. *I* am old-fashioned enough'—and he smiled—'to stick to the *a priori* impossibility of miracles, but then I am a philosopher! *You* have come to see how miracle is manufactured, to recognise in it merely a natural inevitable outgrowth of human testimony, in its pre-scientific stages. It has been all experimental, inductive. I imagine'—he looked up—'you did n't get much help out of the orthodox apologists?'

Robert shrugged his shoulders.

'It often seemed to me,' he said drearily, 'I might have got through, but for the men whose books I used to read and respect most in old days. The point of view is generally so extraordinarily limited. Westcott, for instance, who means so much nowadays to

the English religious world, first isolates Christianity from all the other religious phenomena of the world, and then argues upon its details. You might as well isolate English jurisprudence, and discuss its details without any reference to Teutonic custom or Roman law! You may be as logical or as learned as you like within the limits chosen, but the whole result is false! You treat Christian witness and Biblical literature as you would treat no other witness, and no other literature in the world. And you cannot show cause enough. For your reasons depend on the very witness under dispute. And so you go on arguing in a circle, *ad infinitum.*'

But his voice dropped. The momentary eagerness died away as quickly as it had risen, leaving nothing but depression behind it.

Mr. Grey meditated. At last he said, with a delicate change of tone, —

'And now — if I may ask it, Elsmere — how far has this destructive process gone?'

'I can't tell you,' said Robert, turning away almost with a groan; 'I only know that the things I loved once I love still, and that — that — if I had the heart to think at all, I should see more of God in the world than I ever saw before!'

The tutor's eye flashed. Robert had gone back to the window, and was miserably looking out. After all, he had told only half his story.

'And so you feel you must give up your living?'

'What else is there for me to do?' cried Robert, turning upon him, startled by the slow deliberate tone.

'Well, of course, you know that there are many men,

men with whom both you and I are acquainted, who hold very much what I imagine your opinions now are, or will settle into, who are still in the Church of England, doing admirable work there!'

'I know,' said Elsmere quickly — 'I know; I cannot conceive it, nor could you. Imagine standing up Sunday after Sunday to say the things you do *not* believe, — using words as a convention which those who hear you receive as literal truth, — and trusting the maintenance of your position either to your neighbour's forbearance or to your own powers of evasion! With the ideas at present in my head, nothing would induce me to preach another Easter Day sermon to a congregation that have both a moral and a legal right to demand from me an implicit belief in the material miracle!'

'Yes,' said the other gravely — 'yes, I believe you are right. It can't be said the Broad Church movement has helped us much! How greatly it promised! — how little it has performed! For the private person, the worshipper, it is different — or I think so. No man pries into our prayers; and to cut ourselves off from common worship is to lose that fellowship which is in itself a witness and vehicle of God.'

But his tone had grown hesitating, and touched with melancholy.

There was a moment's silence. Then Robert walked up to him again.

'At the same time,' he said falteringly, standing before the elder man, as he might have stood as an undergraduate, 'let me not be rash! If you think this change has been too rapid to last — if you, knowing

me better than at this moment I can know myself — if you bid me wait a while, before I take any overt step, I will wait — oh, God knows I will wait! — my wife —' and his husky voice failed him utterly.

'Your wife!' cried Mr. Grey, startled. 'Mrs. Elsmere does not know?'

'My wife knows nothing, or almost nothing — and it will break her heart!'

He moved hastily away again, and stood with his back to his friend, his tall narrow form outlined against the window. Mr. Grey was left in dismay, rapidly turning over the impressions of Catherine left on him by his last year's sight of her. That pale distinguished woman with her look of strength and character, — he remembered Langham's analysis of her, and of the silent religious intensity she had brought with her from her training among the Northern hills.

Was there a bitterly human tragedy preparing under all this thought-drama he had been listening to?

Deeply moved, he went up to Robert, and laid his rugged hand almost timidly upon him.

'Elsmere, it won't break her heart! You are a good man. She is a good woman.' What an infinity of meaning there was in the simple words! 'Take courage. Tell her at once — tell her everything — and let *her* decide whether there shall be any waiting. I cannot help you there; she can; she will probably understand you better than you understand yourself.'

He tightened his grasp, and gently pushed his guest into a chair beside him. Robert was deadly pale, his face quivering painfully. The long physical strain of the past months had weakened for the moment all

the controlling forces of the will. Mr. Grey stood over him — the whole man dilating, expanding, under a tyrannous stress of feeling.

'It is hard, it is bitter,' he said slowly, with a wonderful manly tenderness. 'I know it, I have gone through it. So has many and many a poor soul that you and I have known! But there need be no sting in the wound unless we ourselves envenom it. I know — oh! I know very well — the man of the world scoffs, but to him who has once been a Christian of the old sort, the parting with the Christian mythology is the rending asunder of bones and marrow. It means parting with half the confidence, half the joy, of life! But take heart,' and the tone grew still more solemn, still more penetrating. 'It is the education of God! Do not imagine it will put you farther from Him! He is in criticism, in science, in doubt, so long as the doubt is a pure and honest doubt, as yours is. He is in all life, in all thought. The thought of man, as it has shaped itself in institutions, in philosophies, in science, in patient critical work, or in the life of charity, is the one continuous revelation of God! Look for Him in it all; see how, little by little, the Divine indwelling force, using as its tools — but *merely* as its tools! — man's physical appetites and conditions, has built up conscience and the moral life; think how every faculty of the mind has been trained in turn to take its part in the great work of faith upon the visible world! Love and imagination built up religion, — shall reason destroy it? No! — reason is God's like the rest! Trust it, — trust Him. The leading-strings of the past are dropping from you; they are dropping from the world,

not wantonly, or by chance, but in the providence of God. Learn the lesson of your own pain, — learn to seek God, not in any single event of past history, *but in your own soul,* — in the constant verifications of experience, in the life of Christian love. Spiritually you have gone through the last wrench, I promise it you! You being what you are, nothing can cut this ground from under your feet. Whatever may have been the forms of human belief, *faith,* the faith which saves, has always been rooted here! All things change, — creeds and philosophies and outward systems, — but God remains!

> '"Life, that in me has rest,
> As I, undying Life, have power in Thee!"'.

The lines dropped with low vibrating force from lips unaccustomed indeed to such an outburst. The speaker stood a moment longer in silence beside the figure in the chair, and it seemed to Robert, gazing at him with fixed eyes, that the man's whole presence, at once so homely and so majestic, was charged with benediction. It was as though invisible hands of healing and consecration had been laid upon him. The fiery soul beside him had kindled anew the drooping life of his own. So the torch of God passes on its way, hand reaching out to hand.

He bent forward, stammering incoherent words of assent and gratitude, he knew not what. Mr. Grey, who had sunk into his chair, gave him time to recover himself. The intensity of the tutor's own mood relaxed; and presently he began to talk to his guest, in a wholly different tone, of the practical detail of the

step before him, supposing it to be taken immediately, discussing the probable attitude of Robert's bishop, the least conspicuous mode of withdrawing from the living, and so on — all with gentleness and sympathy indeed, but with an indefinable change of manner, which showed that he felt it well both for himself and Elsmere to repress any further expression of emotion. There was something, a vein of stoicism perhaps, in Mr. Grey's temper of mind, which, while it gave a special force and sacredness to his rare moments of fervent speech, was wont in general to make men more self-controlled than usual in his presence. Robert felt now the bracing force of it.

'Will you stay with us to dinner?' Mr. Grey asked when at last Elsmere got up to go. 'There are one or two lone Fellows coming — asked before your telegram came, of course. Do exactly as you like.'

'I think not,' said Robert, after a pause. 'I longed to see you, but I am not fit for general society.'

Mr. Grey did not press him. He rose and went with his visitor to the door.

'Good-bye, good-bye! Let me always know what I can do for you. And your wife — poor thing, poor thing! Go and tell her, Elsmere; don't lose a moment you can help. God help her and you!'

They grasped each other's hands. Mr. Grey followed him down the stairs and along the narrow hall. He opened the hall door, and smiled a last smile of encouragement and sympathy into the eyes that expressed such a young moved gratitude. The door closed. Little did Elsmere realise that never, in this life, would he see that smile or hear that voice again!

## CHAPTER XXVIII

In half an hour from the time Mr. Grey's door closed upon him, Elsmere had caught a convenient cross-country train, and had left the Oxford towers and spires, the shrunken summer Isis, and the flat hot river meadows far behind him. He had meant to stay at Merton, as we know, for the night. Now, his one thought was to get back to Catherine. The urgency of Mr. Grey's words was upon him, and love had a miserable pang that it should have needed to be urged.

By eight o'clock he was again at Churton. There were no carriages waiting at the little station, but the thought of the walk across the darkening common through the August moonrise had been a refreshment to him in the heat and crowd of the train. He hurried through the small town, where the streets were full of summer idlers, and the lamps were twinkling in the still balmy air, along a dusty stretch of road, leaving man and his dwellings farther and farther to the rear of him, till at last he emerged on a boundless tract of common, and struck to the right into a cart-track leading to Murewell.

He was on the top of a high sandy ridge, looking west and north, over a wide evening world of heather and wood and hill. To the right, far ahead, across the misty lower grounds into which he was soon to plunge, rose the woods of Murewell, black and massive in the twilight distance. To the left, but on a nearer plane,

the undulating common stretching downwards from where he stood rose suddenly towards a height crowned with a group of gaunt and jagged firs — landmarks for all the plain — of which every ghostly bough and crest was now sharply outlined against a luminous sky. For the wide heaven in front of him was still delicately glowing in all its under parts with soft harmonies of dusky red or blue, while in its higher zone the same tract of sky was closely covered with the finest network of pearl-white cloud, suffused at the moment with a silver radiance so intense that a spectator might almost have dreamed the moon had forgotten its familiar place of rising, and was about to mount into a startled expectant west. Not a light in all the wide expanse, and for a while not a sound of human life, save the beat of Robert's step, or the occasional tap of his stick against the pebbles of the road.

Presently he reached the edge of the ridge whence the rough track he was following sank sharply to the lower levels. Here was a marvellous point of view, and the rector stood a moment, beside a bare weather-blasted fir, a ghostly shadow thrown behind him. All around the gorse and heather seemed still radiating light, as though the air had been so drenched in sunshine that even long after the sun had vanished the invading darkness found itself still unable to win firm possession of earth and sky. Every little stone in the sandy road was still weirdly visible; the colour of the heather, now in lavish bloom, could be felt though hardly seen.

Before him melted line after line of woodland, broken by hollow after hollow, filled with vaporous

wreaths of mist. About him were the sounds of a wild nature. The air was resonant with the purring of the nightjars, and every now and then he caught the loud clap of their wings as they swayed unsteadily through the furze and bracken. Overhead a trio of wild ducks flew across, from pond to pond, their hoarse cry descending through the darkness. The partridges on the hill called to each other, and certain sharp sounds betrayed to the solitary listener the presence of a flock of swans on a neighbouring pool.

The rector felt himself alone on a wide earth. It was almost with a start of pleasure that he caught at last the barking of dogs on a few distant farms, or the dim thunderous rush of a train through the wide wooded landscape beyond the heath. Behind that frowning mass of wood lay the rectory. The lights must be lit in the little drawing-room; Catherine must be sitting by the lamp, her fine head bent over book or work, grieving for him perhaps, her anxious expectant heart going out to him through the dark. He thinks of the village lying wrapped in the peace of the August night, the lamp-rays from shop-front or casement streaming out on to the green; he thinks of his child, of his dead mother, feeling heavy and bitter within him all the time the message of separation and exile.

But his mood was no longer one of mere dread, of helpless pain, of miserable self-scorn. Contact with Henry Grey had brought him that rekindling of the flame of conscience, that medicinal stirring of the soul's waters, which is the most precious boon that man can give to man. In that sense which attaches to every successive resurrection of our best life from the

shades of despair or selfishness, he had that day, almost that hour, been born again. He was no longer filled mainly with the sense of personal failure, with scorn for his own blundering impetuous temper, so lacking in prescience and in balance; or, in respect to his wife, with such an anguished impotent remorse. He was nerved and braced; whatever oscillations the mind might go through in its search for another equilibrium, to-night there was a moment of calm. The earth to him was once more full of God, existence full of value.

'The things I have always loved, I love still!' he had said to Mr. Grey. And in this healing darkness it was as if the old loves, the old familiar images of thought, returned to him new-clad, re-entering the desolate heart in a white-winged procession of consolation. On the heath beside him the Christ stood once more, and as the disciple felt the sacred presence he could bear for the first time to let the chafing pent-up current of love flow into the new channels, so painfully prepared for it by the toil of thought. '*Either God or an impostor.*' What scorn the heart, the intellect, threw on the alternative! Not in the dress of speculations which represent the product of long past, long superseded looms of human thought, but in the guise of common manhood, laden like his fellows with the pathetic weight of human weakness and human ignorance, the Master moves towards him —

'*Like you, my son, I struggled and I prayed. Like you, I had my days of doubt and nights of wrestling. I had my dreams, my delusions, with my fellows. I was weak; I suffered; I died. But God was in me, and the courage, the*

*patience, the love He gave to me, the scenes of the poor human life He inspired, have become by His will the world's eternal lesson — man's primer of Divine things, hung high in the eyes of all, simple and wise, that all may see and all may learn. Take it to your heart again — that life, that pain, of mine! Use it to new ends; apprehend it in new ways; but knowledge shall not take it from you; and love, instead of weakening or forgetting, if it be but faithful, shall find ever fresh power of realising and renewing itself.'*

So said the vision; and carrying the passion of it deep in his heart the rector went his way, down the long stony hill, past the solitary farm amid the trees at the foot of it, across the grassy common beyond, with its sentinel clumps of beeches, past an ethereal string of tiny lakes just touched by the moonrise, beside some of the first cottages of Murewell, up the hill, with pulse beating and step quickening, and round into the stretch of road leading to his own gate.

As soon as he had passed the screen made by the shrubs on the lawn, he saw it all as he had seen it in his waking dream on the common — the lamplight, the open windows, the white muslin curtains swaying a little in the soft evening air, and Catherine's figure seen dimly through them.

The noise of the gate, however — of the steps on the drive — had startled her. He saw her rise quickly from her low chair, put some work down beside her, and move in haste to the window.

'Robert!' she cried in amazement.

'Yes,' he answered, still some yards from her, his voice coming strangely to her out of the moonlit dark-

ness. 'I did my errand early; I found I could get back; and here I am.'

She flew to the door, opened it, and felt herself caught in his arms.

'Robert, you are quite damp!' she said, fluttering and shrinking, for all her sweet habitual gravity of manner — was it the passion of that yearning embrace? 'Have you walked?'

'Yes. It is the dew on the common, I suppose. The grass was drenched.'

'Will you have some food? They can bring back the supper directly.'

'I don't want any food now,' he said, hanging up his hat. 'I got some lunch in town, and a cup of soup at Reading coming back. Perhaps you will give me some tea soon — not yet.'

He came up to her, pushing back the thick disordered locks of hair from his eyes with one hand, the other held out to her. As he came under the light of the hall lamp she was so startled by the grey pallor of the face that she caught hold of his outstretched hand with both hers. What she said he never knew — her look was enough. He put his arm round her, and as he opened the drawing-room door holding her pressed against him, she felt the desperate agitation in him penetrating, beating against an almost iron self-control of manner. He shut the door behind them.

'Robert, dear Robert!' she said, clinging to him, 'there is bad news, — tell me — there is something to tell me! Oh! what is it — what is it?'

It was almost like a child's wail. His brow contracted still more painfully.

'My darling,' he said; 'my darling — my dear dear wife!' and he bent his head down to her as she lay against his breast, kissing her hair with a passion of pity, of remorse, of tenderness, which seemed to rend his whole nature.

'Tell me — tell me — Robert!'

He guided her gently across the room, past the sofa over which her work lay scattered, past the flower-table, now a many-coloured mass of roses, which was her especial pride, past the remains of a brick castle which had delighted Mary's wondering eyes and mischievous fingers an hour or two before, to a low chair by the open window looking on the wide moonlit expanse of cornfield. He put her into it, walked to the window on the other side of the room, shut it, and drew down the blind. Then he went back to her, and sank down beside her, kneeling, her hands in his.

'My dear wife — you have loved me — you do love me?'

She could not answer, she could only press his hands with her cold fingers, with a look and gesture that implored him to speak.

'Catherine,' he said, still kneeling before her, 'you remember that night you came down to me in the study, the night I told you I was in trouble and you could not help me. Did you guess from what I said what the trouble was?'

'Yes,' she answered, trembling, 'yes, I did, Robert; I thought you were depressed — troubled — about religion.'

'And I know,' he said with an outburst of feeling, kissing her hands as they lay in his — 'I know very

well that you went upstairs and prayed for me, my white-souled angel! But, Catherine, the trouble grew—it got blacker and blacker. You were there beside me, and you could not help me. I dared not tell you about it; I could only struggle on alone, so terribly alone, sometimes; and now I am beaten, beaten. And I come to you to ask you to help me in the only thing that remains to me. Help me, Catherine, to be an honest man — to follow conscience — to say and do the truth!'

'Robert,' she said piteously, deadly pale, 'I don't understand.'

'Oh, my poor darling!' he cried, with a kind of moan of pity and misery. Then still holding her, he said, with strong deliberate emphasis, looking into the grey-blue eyes — the quivering face so full of austerity and delicacy, —

'For six or seven months, Catherine — really for much longer, though I never knew it — I have been fighting with *doubt* — doubt of orthodox Christianity — doubt of what the Church teaches — of what I have to say and preach every Sunday. First it crept on me I knew not how. Then the weight grew heavier, and I began to struggle with it. I felt I must struggle with it. Many men, I suppose, in my position would have trampled on their doubts — would have regarded them as sin in themselves, would have felt it their duty to ignore them as much as possible, trusting to time and God's help. I *could* not ignore them. The thought of questioning the most sacred beliefs that you and I' — and his voice faltered a moment — 'held in common was misery to me. On the other hand, I knew

myself. I knew that I could no more go on living to any purpose, with a whole region of the mind shut up, as it were, barred away from the rest of me, than I could go on living with a secret between myself and you. I could not hold my faith by a mere tenure of tyranny and fear. Faith that is not free — that is not the faith of the whole creature, body, soul, and intellect — seemed to me a faith worthless both to God and man!'

Catherine looked at him stupefied. The world seemed to be turning round her. Infinitely more terrible than his actual words was the accent running through words and tone and gesture — the accent of irreparableness, as of something dismally *done* and *finished*. What did it all mean? For what had he brought her there? She sat stunned, realising with awful force the feebleness, the inadequacy, of her own fears.

He, meanwhile, had paused a moment, meeting her gaze with those yearning sunken eyes. Then he went on, his voice changing a little, —

'But if I had wished it ever so much, I could not have helped myself. The process, so to speak, had gone too far by the time I knew where I was. I think the change must have begun before the Mile End time. Looking back, I see the foundations were laid in — in — the work of last winter.'

She shivered. He stooped and kissed her hands again passionately. 'Am I poisoning even the memory of our past for you?' he cried. Then, restraining himself at once, he hurried on again: 'After Mile End you remember I began to see much of the squire. Oh, my wife, don't look at me so! It was not his doing in any true sense. I am not such a weak shuttlecock as that!

But being where I was before our intimacy began, his influence hastened everything. I don't wish to minimise it. I was not made to stand alone!'

And again that bitter, perplexed, half-scornful sense of his own pliancy at the hands of circumstance as compared with the rigidity of other men descended upon him. Catherine made a faint movement as though to draw her hands away.

'Was it well,' she said, in a voice which sounded like a harsh echo of her own, 'was it right for a clergyman to discuss sacred things — with such a man?'

He let her hands go, guided for the moment by a delicate imperious instinct which bade him appeal to something else than love. Rising, he sat down opposite to her on the low window-seat, while she sank back into her chair, her fingers clinging to the arm of it, the lamplight far behind deepening all the shadows of the face, the hollows in the cheeks, the line of experience and will about the mouth. The stupor in which she had just listened to him was beginning to break up. Wild forces of condemnation and resistance were rising in her; and he knew it. He knew, too, that as yet she only half-realised the situation, and that blow after blow still remained to him to deal.

'Was it right that I should discuss religious matters with the squire?' he repeated, his face resting on his hands. 'What are religious matters, Catherine, and what are not?'

Then, still controlling himself rigidly, his eyes fixed on the shadowy face of his wife, his ear catching her quick uneven breath, he went once more through the dismal history of the last few months, dwelling on his

state of thought before the intimacy with Mr. Wendover began, on his first attempts to escape the squire's influence, on his gradual pitiful surrender. Then he told the story of the last memorable walk before the squire's journey, of the moment in the study afterwards, and of the months of feverish reading and wrestling which had followed. Half-way through it a new despair seized him. What was the good of all he was saying? He was speaking a language she did not really understand. What were all these critical and literary considerations to her?

The rigidity of her silence showed him that her sympathy was not with him, that in comparison with the vibrating protest of her own passionate faith which must be now ringing through her, whatever he could urge must seem to her the merest culpable trifling with the soul's awful destinies. In an instant of tumultuous speech he could not convey to her the temper and results of his own complex training, and on that training, as he very well knew, depended the piercing, convincing force of all that he was saying. There were gulfs between them — gulfs which, as it seemed to him, in a miserable insight, could never be bridged again. Oh, the frightful separateness of experience!

Still he struggled on. He brought the story down to the conversation at the Hall, described — in broken words of fire and pain — the moment of spiritual wreck which had come upon him in the August lane, his night of struggle, his resolve to go to Mr. Grey. And all through he was not so much narrating as pleading a cause, and that not his own, but Love's. Love was at the bar, and it was for love that the eloquent voice,

the pale varying face, were really pleading, through all the long story of intellectual change.

At the mention of Mr. Grey, Catherine grew restless; she sat up suddenly, with a cry of bitterness.

'Robert, why did you go away from me? It was cruel. I should have known first. He had no right — no right!'

She clasped her hands round her knees, her beautiful mouth set and stern. The moon had been sailing westward all this time, and as Catherine bent forward the yellow light caught her face, and brought out the haggard change in it. He held out his hands to her with a low groan, helpless against her reproach, her jealousy. He dared not speak of what Mr. Grey had done for him, of the tenderness of his counsel towards her specially. He felt that everything he could say would but torture the wounded heart still more.

But she did not notice the outstretched hands. She covered her face in silence a moment, as though trying to see her way more clearly through the mazes of disaster; and he waited. At last she looked up.

'I cannot follow all you have been saying,' she said, almost harshly. 'I know so little of books, I cannot give them the place you do. You say you have convinced yourself the Gospels are like other books, full of mistakes, and credulous, like the people of the time; and therefore you can't take what they say as you used to take it. But what does it all quite mean? Oh, I am not clever — I cannot see my way clear from thing to thing as you do. If there are mistakes, does it matter so — so — terribly to you?' and she faltered. 'Do you think *nothing* is true because something may

be false? Did not — did not — Jesus still live, and die, and rise again? — *can* you doubt — *do* you doubt — that He rose — that He is God — that He is in heaven — that we shall see Him?'

She threw an intensity into every word, which made the short breathless questions thrill through him, through the nature saturated and steeped as hers was in Christian association, with a bitter accusing force. But he did not flinch from them.

'I can believe no longer in an Incarnation and Resurrection,' he said slowly, but with a resolute plainness. 'Christ is risen in our hearts, in the Christian life of charity. Miracle is a natural product of human feeling and imagination; and God was in Jesus — preeminently, as He is in all great souls, but not otherwise — not otherwise in kind than He is in me or you.'

His voice dropped to a whisper. She grew paler and paler.

'So to you,' she said presently in the same strange altered voice, 'my father — when I saw that light on his face before he died, when I heard him cry, "Master, *I come!*" was dying — deceived — deluded. Perhaps even,' and she trembled, 'you think it ends here — our life — our love?'

It was agony to him to see her driving herself through this piteous catechism. The lantern of memory flashed a moment on to the immortal picture of Faust and Margaret. Was it not only that winter they had read the scene together?

Forcibly he possessed himself once more of those closely locked hands, pressing their coldness on his own burning eyes and forehead in hopeless silence.

'*Do* you, Robert?' she repeated insistently.

'I know nothing,' he said, his eyes still hidden. 'I know nothing! But I trust God with all that is dearest to me, with our love, with the soul that is His breath, His work in us!'

The pressure of her despair seemed to be wringing his own faith out of him, forcing into definiteness things and thoughts that had been lying in an accepted, even a welcomed, obscurity.

She tried again to draw her hands away, but he would not let them go. 'And the end of it all, Robert?' she said — 'the end of it?'

Never did he forget the note of that question, the desolation of it, the indefinable change of accent. It drove him into a harsh abruptness of reply.

'The end of it — so far — must be, if I remain an honest man, that I must give up my living, that I must cease to be a minister of the Church of England. What the course of our life after that shall be is in your hands — absolutely.'

She caught her breath painfully. His heart was breaking for her, and yet there was something in her manner now which kept down caresses and repressed all words.

Suddenly, however, as he sat there mutely watching her, he found her at his knees, her dear arms around him, her face against his breast.

'Robert, my husband, my darling, it *cannot* be! It is a madness — a delusion. God is trying you, and me! You cannot be planning so to desert Him, so to deny Christ — you cannot, my husband. Come away with me, away from books and work, into some quiet place

where He can make Himself heard. You are overdone, overdriven. Do nothing now — say nothing — except to me. Be patient a little, and He will give you back Himself! What can books and arguments matter to you or me? Have we not *known* and *felt* Him as He is — have we not, Robert? Come!'

She pushed herself backwards, smiling at him with an exquisite tenderness. The tears were streaming down her cheeks. They were wet on his own. Another moment and Robert would have lost the only clue which remained to him through the mists of this bewildering world. He would have yielded again as he had many times yielded before, for infinitely less reason, to the urgent pressure of another's individuality, and having jeopardised love for truth, he would now have murdered — or tried to murder — in himself the sense of truth for love.

But he did neither.

Holding her close pressed against him, he said in breaks of intense speech: 'If you wish, Catherine, I will wait — I will wait till you bid me speak — but I warn you — there is something dead in me — something gone and broken. It can never live again — except in forms which now it would only pain you more to think of. It is not that I think differently of this point or that point — but of life and religion altogether. I see God's purposes in quite other proportions, as it were. Christianity seems to me something small and local. Behind it, around it — including it — I see the great drama of the world, sweeping on — led by God — from change to change, from act to act. It is not that Christianity is false, but that it is only an im-

perfect human reflexion of a part of truth. Truth has never been, can never be, contained in any one creed or system!'

She heard, but through her exhaustion, through the bitter sinking of hope, she only half-understood. Only she realised that she and he were alike helpless — both struggling in the grip of some force outside themselves, inexorable, ineluctable.

Robert felt her arms relaxing, felt the dead weight of her form against him. He raised her to her feet, he half-carried her to the door, and on to the stairs. She was nearly fainting, but her will held it at bay. He threw open the door of their room, led her in, lifted her — unresisting — on to the bed. Then her head fell to one side, and her lips grew ashen. In an instant or two he had done for her all that his medical knowledge could suggest with rapid decided hands. She was not quite unconscious; she drew up round her, as though with a strong vague sense of chill, the shawl he laid over her, and gradually the slightest shade of colour came back to her lips. But as soon as she opened her eyes and met those of Robert fixed upon her, the heavy lids dropped again.

'Would you rather be alone?' he said to her, kneeling beside her.

She made a faint affirmative movement of the head, and the cold hand he had been chafing tried feebly to withdraw itself. He rose at once, and stood a moment beside her, looking down at her. Then he went.

## CHAPTER XXIX

He shut the door softly, and went downstairs again. It was between ten and eleven. The lights in the lower passage were just extinguished; every one else in the house had gone to bed. Mechanically he stooped and put away the child's bricks, he pushed the chairs back into their places, and then he paused a while before the open window. But there was not a tremor on the set face. He felt himself capable of no more emotion. The fount of feeling, of pain; was for the moment dried up. What he was mainly noticing was the effect of some occasional gusts of night-wind on the moonlit cornfield; the silver ripples they sent through it; the shadows thrown by some great trees in the western corners of the field; the glory of the moon itself in the pale immensity of the sky.

Presently he turned away, leaving one lamp still burning in the room, softly unlocked the hall door, took his hat, and went out. He walked up and down the wood-path or sat on the bench there for some time, thinking indeed, but thinking with a certain stern practical dryness. Whenever he felt the thrill of feeling stealing over him again, he would make a sharp effort at repression. Physically he could not bear much more, and he knew it. A part remained for him to play, which must be played with tact, with prudence, and with firmness. Strength and nerves had been sufficiently weakened already. For his wife's sake, his

people's sake, his honourable reputation's sake, he must guard himself from a collapse which might mean far more than physical failure.

So in the most patient methodical way he began to plan out the immediate future. As to waiting, the matter was still in Catherine's hands; but he knew that finely tempered soul; he knew that when she had mastered her poor woman's self, as she had always mastered it from her childhood, she would not bid him wait. He hardly took the possibility into consideration. The proposal had had some reality in his eyes when he went to see Mr. Grey; now it had none, though he could hardly have explained why.

He had already made arrangements with an old Oxford friend to take his duty during his absence on the Continent. It had been originally suggested that this Mr. Armitstead should come to Murewell on the Monday following the Sunday they were now approaching, spend a few days with them before their departure, and be left to his own devices in the house and parish, about the Thursday or Friday. An intense desire now seized Robert to get hold of the man at once, before the next Sunday. It was strange how the interview with his wife seemed to have crystallised, precipitated, everything. How infinitely more real the whole matter looked to him since the afternoon! It had passed — at any rate for the time — out of the region of thought, into the hurrying evolution of action, and as soon as action began it was characteristic of Robert's rapid energetic nature to feel this thirst, to make it as prompt, as complete, as possible. The

fiery soul yearned for a fresh consistency, though it were a consistency of loss and renunciation.

To-morrow he must write to the bishop. The bishop's residence was only eight or ten miles from Murewell; he supposed his interview with him would take place about Monday or Tuesday. He could see the tall stooping figure of the kindly old man rising to meet him; he knew exactly the sort of arguments that would be brought to bear upon him. Oh, that it were done with — this wearisome dialectical necessity! His life for months had been one long argument. If he were but left free to feel, and live again!

The practical matter which weighed most heavily upon him was the function connected with the opening of the new Institute, which had been fixed for the Saturday — the next day but one. How was he — but much more how was Catherine — to get through it? His lips would be sealed as to any possible withdrawal from the living, for he could not by then have seen the bishop. He looked forward to the gathering, the crowds, the local enthusiasm, the signs of his own popularity, with a sickening distaste. The one thing real to him through it all would be Catherine's white face, and their bitter joint consciousness.

And then he said to himself, sharply, that his own feelings counted for nothing. Catherine should be tenderly shielded from all avoidable pain, but for himself there must be no flinching, no self-indulgent weakness. Did he not owe every last hour he had to give to the people amongst whom he had planned to spend the best energies of life, and from whom his own act was about to part him in this lame impotent fashion?

Midnight! The sounds rolled silverly out, effacing the soft murmurs of the night. So the long interminable day was over, and a new morning had begun. He rose, listening to the echoes of the bell, and — as the tide of feeling surged back upon him — passionately commending the new-born day to God.

Then he turned towards the house, put the light out in the drawing-room, and went upstairs, stepping cautiously. He opened the door of Catherine's room. The moonlight was streaming in through the white blinds. Catherine, who had undressed, was lying now with her face hidden in the pillow, and one white-sleeved arm flung across little Mary's cot. The night was hot, and the child would evidently have thrown off all its coverings had it not been for the mother's hand, which lay lightly on the tiny shoulder, keeping one thin blanket in its place.

'Catherine,' he whispered, standing beside her.

She turned, and by the light of the candle he held shaded from her he saw the austere remoteness of her look, as of one who had been going through deep waters of misery, alone with God. His heart sank. For the first time that look seemed to exclude him from her inmost life.

He sank down beside her, took the hand lying on the child, and laid down his head upon it, mutely kissing it. But he said nothing. Of what further avail could words be just then to either of them? Only he felt through every fibre the coldness, the irresponsiveness of those fingers lying in his.

'Would it prevent your sleeping,' he asked her presently, 'if I came to read here, as I used to when

you were ill? I could shade the light from you, of course.'

She raised her head suddenly.

'But you — you ought to sleep.'

Her tone was anxious, but strangely quiet and aloof.

'Impossible!' he said, pressing his hand over his eyes as he rose. 'At any rate I will read first.'

His sleeplessness at any time of excitement or strain was so inveterate, and so familiar to them both by now, that she could say nothing. She turned away with a long sobbing breath, which seemed to go through her from head to foot. He stood a moment beside her, fighting strong impulses of remorse and passion, and ultimately maintaining silence and self-control.

In another minute or two he was sitting beside her feet, in a low chair drawn to the edge of the bed, the light arranged so as to reach his book without touching either mother or child. He had run over the book-shelf in his own room, shrinking painfully from any of his common religious favourites as one shrinks from touching a still sore and throbbing nerve, and had at last carried off a volume of Spencer.

And so the night began to wear away. For the first hour or two, every now and then, a stifled sob would make itself just faintly heard. It was a sound to wring the heart, for what it meant was that not even Catherine Elsmere's extraordinary powers of self-suppression could avail to check the outward expression of an inward torture. Each time it came and went, it seemed to Elsmere that a fraction of his youth went with it.

At last exhaustion brought her a restless sleep. As soon as Elsmere caught the light breathing which told

him she was not conscious of her grief, or of him, his book slipped on to his knee.

> 'Open the temple gates unto my love,
> Open them wide that she may enter in,
> And all the posts adorn as doth behove,
> And all the pillars deck with garlands trim,
> For to receive this saint with honour due
> That cometh in to you.
> With trembling steps and humble reverence,
> She cometh in before the Almighty's view.'

The leaves fell over as the book dropped, and these lines, which had been to him, as to other lovers, the utterance of his own bridal joy, emerged. They brought about him a host of images — a little grey church penetrated everywhere by the roar of a swollen river; outside, a road filled with empty farmers' carts, and shouting children carrying branches of mountain-ash — winding on and up into the heart of wild hills dyed with reddening fern, the sun-gleams stealing from crag to crag, and shoulder to shoulder; inside, row after row of intent faces, all turned towards the central passage, and, moving towards him, a figure 'clad all in white, that seems a virgin best,' whose every step brings nearer to him the heaven of his heart's desire. Everything is plain to him — Mrs. Thornburgh's round cheeks and marvellous curls and jubilant airs, Mrs. Leyburn's mild and tearful pleasure, the vicar's solid satisfaction. With what confiding joy had those who loved her given her to him! And he knows well that out of all griefs, the grief he has brought upon her in two short years is the one which will seem to her hardest to bear. Very few

women of the present day could feel this particular calamity as Catherine Elsmere must feel it.

'Was it a crime to love and win you, my darling?' he cried to her in his heart. 'Ought I to have had more self-knowledge? Could I have guessed where I was taking you? Oh, how could I know — how could I know?'

But it was impossible to him to sink himself wholly in the past. Inevitably such a nature as Elsmere's turns very quickly from despair to hope; from the sense of failure to the passionate planning of new effort. In time will he not be able to comfort her, and, after a miserable moment of transition, to repair her trust in him and make their common life once more rich towards God and man? There must be painful readjustment and friction, no doubt. He tries to see the facts as they truly are, fighting against his own optimist tendencies, and realising as best he can all the changes which his great change must introduce into their most intimate relations. But after all can love and honesty and a clear conscience do nothing to bridge over, nay, to efface, such differences as theirs will be?

Oh to bring her to understand him! At this moment he shrinks painfully from the thought of touching her faith — his own sense of loss is too heavy, too terrible. But if she will only be still open with him! — still give him her deepest heart, any lasting difference between them will surely be impossible. Each will complete the other, and love knit up the ravelled strands again into a stronger unity.

Gradually he lost himself in half-articulate prayer, in the solemn girding of the will to this future task of

a re-creating love. And by the time the morning light had well established itself sleep had fallen on him. When he became sensible of the longed-for drowsiness, he merely stretched out a tired hand and drew over him a shawl hanging at the foot of the bed. He was too utterly worn out to think of moving.

When he woke the sun was streaming into the room, and behind him sat the tiny Mary on the edge of the bed, the rounded apple cheeks and wild-bird eyes aglow with mischief and delight. She had climbed out of her cot, and, finding no check to her progress, had crept on, till now she sat triumphantly, with one diminutive leg and rosy foot doubled under her, and her father's thick hair at the mercy of her invading fingers, which, however, were as yet touching him half-timidly, as though something in his sleep had awed the baby sense.

But Catherine was gone.

He sprang up with a start. Mary was frightened by the abrupt movement, perhaps disappointed by the escape of her prey, and raised a sudden wail.

He carried her to her nurse, even forgetting to kiss the little wet cheek, ascertained that Catherine was not in the house, and then came back, miserable, with the bewilderment of sleep still upon him. A sense of wrong rose high within him. How *could* she have left him thus without a word?

It had been her way, sometimes, during the summer, to go out early to one or other of the sick folk who were under her especial charge. Possibly she had gone to a woman, just confined, on the farther side of the village, who yesterday had been in danger.

But, whatever explanation he could make for himself, he was none the less irrationally wretched. He bathed, dressed, and sat down to his solitary meal in a state of tension and agitation indescribable. All the exaltation, the courage of the night, was gone.

Nine o'clock, ten o'clock, and no sign of Catherine.

'Your mistress must have been detained somewhere,' he said as quietly and carelessly as he could to Susan, the parlour-maid, who had been with them since their marriage. 'Leave breakfast things for one.'

'Mistress took a cup of milk when she went out, cook says,' observed the little maid with a consoling intention, wondering the while at the rector's haggard mien and restless movements.

'Nursing other people indeed!' she observed severely downstairs, glad as we all are at times to pick holes in excellence which is inconveniently high. 'Missis had a deal better stay at home and nurse *him!*'

The day was excessively hot. Not a leaf moved in the garden; over the cornfield the air danced in long vibrations of heat; the woods and hills beyond were indistinct and colourless. Their dog Dandy lay sleeping in the sun, waking up every now and then to avenge himself on the flies. On the far edge of the cornfield reaping was beginning. Robert stood on the edge of the sunk fence, his blind eyes resting on the line of men, his ear catching the shouts of the farmer directing operations from his grey horse. He could do nothing. The night before, in the wood-path, he had clearly mapped out the day's work. A mass of business was waiting, clamouring to be done. He tried to begin on this or that, and gave up everything with a groan, wan-

dering out again to the gate on to the wood-path to sweep the distances of road or field with hungry straining eyes.

The wildest fears had taken possession of him. Running in his head was a passage from 'The Confessions,' describing Monica's horror of her son's heretical opinions. 'Shrinking from and detesting the blasphemies of his error, she began to doubt whether it was right in her to allow her son to live in her house and to eat at the same table with her'; and the mother's heart, he remembered, could only be convinced of the lawfulness of its own yearning by a prophetic vision of the youth's conversion. He recalled, with a shiver, how in the life of Madame Guyon, after describing the painful and agonising death of a kind but comparatively irreligious husband, she quietly adds, 'As soon as I heard that my husband had just expired, I said to Thee, O my God, Thou hast broken my bonds, and I will offer to Thee a sacrifice of praise!' He thought of John Henry Newman, disowning all the ties of kinship with his younger brother because of divergent views on the question of baptismal regeneration; of the long tragedy of Blanco White's life, caused by the slow dropping-off of friend after friend, on the ground of heretical belief. What right had he, or any one in such a strait as his, to assume that the faith of the present is no longer capable of the same stern self-destructive consistency as the faith of the past? He knew that to such Christian purity, such Christian inwardness as Catherine's, the ultimate sanction and legitimacy of marriage rest, both in theory and practice, on a common acceptance of the definite commands

and promises of a miraculous revelation. He had had a proof of it in Catherine's passionate repugnance to the idea of Rose's marriage with Edward Langham.

Eleven o'clock striking from the distant tower. He walked desperately along the wood-path, meaning to go through the copse at the end of it towards the park, and look there. He had just passed into the copse, a thick interwoven mass of young trees, when he heard the sound of the gate which on the farther side of it led on to the road. He hurried on; the trees closed behind him; the grassy path broadened; and there, under an arch of young oak and hazel, stood Catherine, arrested by the sound of his step. He, too, stopped at the sight of her; he could not go on. Husband and wife looked at each other one long quivering moment. Then Catherine sprang forward with a sob and threw herself on his breast.

They clung to each other, she in a passion of tears — tears of such self-abandonment as neither Robert nor any other living soul had ever seen Catherine Elsmere shed before. As for him he was trembling from head to foot, his arms scarcely strong enough to hold her, his young worn face bent down over her.

'Oh, Robert!' she sobbed at last, putting up her hand and touching his hair, 'you look so pale, so sad.'

'I have you again!' he said simply.

A thrill of remorse ran through her.

'I went away,' she murmured, her face still hidden — 'I went away, because when I woke up it all seemed to me, suddenly, too ghastly to be believed; I could not stay still and bear it. But, Robert, Robert, I kissed you as I passed! I was so thankful you could

sleep a little and forget. I hardly know where I have been most of the time — I think I have been sitting in a corner of the park, where no one ever comes. I began to think of all you said to me last night — to put it together — to try and understand it, and it seemed to me more and more horrible! I thought of what it would be like to have to hide my prayers from you — my faith in Christ — my hope of heaven. I thought of bringing up the child — how all that was vital to me would be a superstition to you, which you would bear with for my sake. I thought of death,' and she shuddered — 'your death, or my death, and how this change in you would cleave a gulf of misery between us. And then I thought of losing my own faith, of denying Christ. It was a nightmare — I saw myself on a long road, escaping with Mary in my arms, escaping from you! Oh, Robert! it was n't only for myself,' — and she clung to him as though she were a child, confessing, explaining away, some grievous fault hardly to be forgiven. 'I was agonised by the thought that I was not my own — I and my child were *Christ's*. Could I risk what was His? Other men and women had died, had given up all for His sake. Is there no one now strong enough to suffer torment, to kill even love itself rather than deny Him — rather than crucify Him afresh?'

She paused, struggling for breath. The terrible excitement of that bygone moment had seized upon her again and communicated itself to him.

'And then — and then,' she said, sobbing, 'I don't know how it was. One moment I was sitting up looking straight before me, without a tear, thinking of

what was the least I must do, even — even — if you and I stayed together — of all the hard compacts and conditions I must make — judging you all the while from a long, long distance, and feeling as though I had buried the old self — sacrificed the old heart — for ever! And the next I was lying on the ground crying for you, Robert, crying for you! Your face had come back to me as you lay there in the early morning light. I thought how I had kissed you — how pale and grey and thin you looked. Oh, how I loathed myself! That I should think it could be God's will that I should leave you, or torture you, my poor husband! I had not only been wicked towards you — I had offended Christ. I could think of nothing as I lay there — again and again — but "*Little children, love one another; little children, love one another.*" Oh, my beloved,' — and she looked up with the solemnest, tenderest smile breaking on the marred tear-stained face, — 'I will never give up hope, I will pray for you night and day. God will bring you back. You cannot lose yourself so. No, no! His grace is stronger than our wills. But I will not preach to you — I will not persecute you — I will only live beside you — in your heart — and love you always. Oh, how could I — how could I have such thoughts!'

And again she broke off, weeping, as if to the tender torn heart the only crime that could not be forgiven was its own offence against love. As for him he was beyond speech. If he had ever lost his vision of God, his wife's love would that moment have given it back to him.

'Robert,' she said presently, urged on by the sacred

yearning to heal, to atone, 'I will not complain — I will not ask you to wait. I take your word for it that it is best not, that it would do no good. The only hope is in time — and prayer. I must suffer, dear, I must be weak sometimes; but oh, I am so sorry for you! Kiss me, forgive me, Robert; I will be your faithful wife unto our lives' end.'

He kissed her, and in that kiss, so sad, so pitiful, so clinging, their new life was born.

## CHAPTER XXX

But the problem of these two lives was not solved by a burst of feeling. Without that determining impulse of love and pity in Catherine's heart the salvation of an exquisite bond might indeed have been impossible. But in spite of it the laws of character had still to work themselves inexorably out on either side.

The whole gist of the matter for Elsmere lay really in this question: Hidden in Catherine's nature, was there, or was there not, the true stuff of fanaticism? Madame Guyon left her infant children to the mercies of chance, while she followed the voice of God to the holy war with heresy. Under similar conditions Catherine Elsmere might have planned the same. Could she ever have carried it out?

And yet the question is still ill stated. For the influences of our modern time on religious action are so blunting and dulling, because in truth the religious motive itself is being constantly modified, whether the religious person knows it or not. Is it possible now for a good woman with a heart, in Catherine Elsmere's position, to maintain herself against love, and all those subtle forces to which such a change as Elsmere's opens the house-doors, without either hardening, or greatly yielding? Let Catherine's further story give some sort of an answer.

Poor soul! As they sat together in the study, after he had brought her home, Robert, with averted eyes,

went through the plans he had already thought into shape. Catherine listened, saying almost nothing. But never, never had she loved this life of theirs so well as now that she was called on, at barely a week's notice, to give it up for ever! For Robert's scheme, in which her reason fully acquiesced, was to keep to their plan of going to Switzerland, he having first, of course, settled all things with the bishop, and having placed his living in the hands of Mowbray Elsmere. When they left the rectory, in a week or ten days' time, he proposed, in fact, his voice almost inaudible as he did so, that Catherine should leave it for good.

'Everybody had better suppose,' he said, choking, 'that we are coming back. Of course we need say nothing. Armitstead will be here for next week certainly. Then afterwards I can come down and manage everything. I shall get it over in a day if I can, and see nobody. I cannot say good-bye, nor can you.'

'And next Sunday, Robert?' she asked him, after a pause.

'I shall write to Armitstead this afternoon and ask him, if he possibly can, to come to-morrow afternoon, instead of Monday, and take the service.'

Catherine's hands clasped each other still more closely. So then she had heard her husband's voice for the last time in the public ministry of the Church, in prayer, in exhortation, in benediction! One of the most sacred traditions of her life was struck from her at a blow.

It was long before either of them spoke again. Then she ventured another question.

'And have you any idea of what we shall do next, Robert — of — of our future?'

'Shall we try London for a little?' he answered in a queer strained voice, leaning against the window, and looking out, that he might not see her. 'I should find work among the poor — so would you — and I could go on with my book. And your mother and sister will probably be there part of the winter.'

She acquiesced silently. How mean and shrunken a future it seemed to them both, beside the wide and honourable range of his clergyman's life as he and she had developed it. But she did not dwell long on that. Her thoughts were suddenly invaded by the memory of a cottage tragedy in which she had recently taken a prominent part. A girl, a child of fifteen, from one of the crowded Mile End hovels, had gone at Christmas to a distant farm as servant, and come back a month ago, ruined, the victim of an outrage over which Elsmere had ground his teeth in fierce and helpless anger. Catherine had found her a shelter, and was to see her through her 'trouble'; the girl, a frail, half-witted creature, who could find no words even to bewail herself, clinging to her the while with the dumbest, pitifulest tenacity.

How *could* she leave that girl? It was as if all the fibres of life were being violently wrenched from all their natural connexions.

'Robert!' she cried at last, with a start. 'Had you forgotten the Institute to-morrow?'

'No — no,' he said, with the saddest smile. 'No, I had not forgotten it. Don't go, Catherine — don't go. I must. But why should you go through it?'

'But there are all those flags and wreaths,' she said, getting up in pained bewilderment. 'I must go and look after them.'

He caught her in his arms.

'Oh, my wife, my wife, forgive me!' It was a groan of misery. She put up her hands and pressed his hair back from his temples.

'I love you, Robert,' she said simply, her face colourless, but perfectly calm.

Half an hour later, after he had worked through some letters, he went into the workroom and found her surrounded with flags, and a vast litter of paper roses and evergreens, which she and the new agent's daughters who had come up to help her were putting together for the decorations of the morrow. Mary was tottering from chair to chair in high glee, a big pink rose stuck in the belt of her pinafore. His pale wife, trying to smile and talk as usual, her lap full of evergreens, and her politeness exercised by the chatter of the two Miss Batesons, seemed to Robert one of the most pitiful spectacles he had ever seen. He fled from it out into the village driven by a restless longing for change and movement.

Here he found a large gathering round the new Institute. There were carpenters at work on a triumphal arch in front, and close by, an admiring circle of children and old men, huddling in the shade of a great chestnut.

Elsmere spent an hour in the building, helping and superintending, stabbed every now and then by the unsuspecting friendliness of those about him, or worried by their blunt comments on his looks. He

could not bear more than a glance into the new rooms apportioned to the Naturalists' Club. There against the wall stood the new glass cases he had wrung out of the squire, with various new collections lying near, ready to be arranged and unpacked when time allowed. The old collections stood out bravely in the added space and light; the walls were hung here and there with a wonderful set of geographical pictures he had carried off from a London exhibition, and fed his boys on for weeks; the floors were freshly matted; the new pine fittings gave out their pleasant cleanly scent; the white paint of doors and windows shone in the August sun. The building had been given by the squire. The fittings and furniture had been mainly of his providing. What uses he had planned for it all! — only to see the fruits of two years' effort out of doors, and personal frugality at home, handed over to some possibly unsympathetic stranger. The heart beat painfully against the iron bars of fate, rebelling against the power of a mental process so to affect a man's whole practical and social life!

He went out at last by the back of the Institute, where a little bit of garden, spoilt with building materials, led down to a lane.

At the end of the garden, beside the untidy gap in the hedge made by the builders' carts, he saw a man standing, who turned away down the lane, however, as soon as the rector's figure emerged into view.

Robert had recognised the slouching gait and unwieldy form of Henslowe. There were at this moment all kinds of gruesome stories afloat in the village about the ex-agent. It was said that he was breaking up fast;

it was known that he was extensively in debt; and the village shopkeepers had already held an agitated meeting or two, to decide upon the best mode of getting their money out of him, and upon a joint plan of cautious action towards his custom in future. The man, indeed, was sinking deeper and deeper into a pit of sordid misery, maintaining all the while a snarling exasperating front to the world, which was rapidly converting the careless half-malicious pity wherewith the village had till now surveyed his fall into that more active species of baiting which the human animal is never very loth to try upon the limping specimens of his race.

Henslowe stopped and turned as he heard the steps behind him. Six months' self-murdering had left ghastly traces. He was many degrees nearer the brute than he had been even when Robert made his ineffectual visit. But at this actual moment Robert's practised eye — for every English parish clergyman becomes dismally expert in the pathology of drunkenness — saw that there was no fight in him. He was in one of the drunkard's periods of collapse — shivering, flabby, starting at every sound, a misery to himself and a spectacle to others.

'Mr. Henslowe!' cried Robert, still pursuing him, 'may I speak to you a moment?'

The ex-agent turned, his prominent bloodshot eyes glowering at the speaker. But he had to catch at his stick for support, or at the nervous shock of Robert's summons his legs would have given way under him.

Robert came up with him and stood a second, fronting the evil silence of the other, his boyish face deeply

flushed. Perhaps the grotesqueness of that former scene was in his mind. Moreover, the vestry meetings had furnished Henslowe with periodical opportunities for venting his gall on the rector, and they had never been neglected. But he plunged on boldly.

'I am going away next week, Mr. Henslowe; I shall be away some considerable time. Before I go I should like to ask you whether you do not think the feud between us had better cease. Why will you persist in making an enemy of me? If I did you an injury it was neither wittingly nor willingly. I know you have been ill, and I gather that—that—you are in trouble. If I could stand between you and further mischief I would — most gladly. If help — or — or money —' He paused. He shrewdly suspected, indeed, from the reports that reached him, that Henslowe was on the brink of bankruptcy.

The rector had spoken with the utmost diffidence and delicacy, but Henslowe found energy in return for an outburst of quavering animosity, from which, however, physical weakness had extracted all its sting.

'I'll thank you to make your canting offers to some one else, Mr. Elsmere. When I want your advice I'll ask it. Good-day to you.' And he turned away with as much of an attempt at dignity as his shaking limbs would allow of.

'Listen, Mr. Henslowe,' said Robert firmly, walking beside him; 'you know — I know — that if this goes on, in a year's time you will be in your grave, and your poor wife and children struggling to keep themselves from the workhouse. You may think that I have no right to preach to you — that you are the older man —

that it is an intrusion. But what is the good of blinking facts that you must know all the world knows? Come, now, Mr. Henslowe, let us behave for a moment as though this were our last meeting. Who knows? the chances of life are many. Lay down your grudge against me, and let me speak to you as one struggling human being to another. The fact that you have, as you say, become less prosperous, in some sort through me, seems to give me a right — to make it a duty for me, if you will — to help you if I can. Let me send a good doctor to see you. Let me implore you as a last chance to put yourself into his hands, and to obey him, and your wife; and let me,' — the rector hesitated, — 'let me make things pecuniarily easier for Mrs. Henslowe till you have pulled yourself out of the hole in which, by common report at least, you are now.'

Henslowe stared at him, divided between anger caused by the sore stirring of his old self-importance, and a tumultuous flood of self-pity, roused irresistibly in him by Robert's piercing frankness, and aided by his own more or less maudlin condition. The latter sensation quickly undermined the former; he turned his back on the rector and leant over the railings of the lane, shaken by something it is hardly worth while to dignify by the name of emotion. Robert stood by, a pale embodiment of mingled judgement and compassion. He gave the man a few moments to recover himself, and then, as Henslowe turned round again, he silently and appealingly held out his hand — the hand of the good man, which it was an honour for such as Henslowe to touch. Constrained by the moral force

radiating from his look, the other took it with a kind of helpless sullenness.

Then, seizing at once on the slight concession, with that complete lack of inconvenient self-consciousness, or hindering indecision, which was one of the chief causes of his effect on men and women, Robert began to sound the broken repulsive creature as to his affairs. Bit by bit, compelled by a will and nervous strength far superior to his own, Henslowe was led into abrupt and blurted confidences which surprised no one so much as himself. Robert's quick sense possessed itself of point after point, seeing presently ways of escape and relief which the besotted brain beside him had been quite incapable of devising for itself. They walked on into the open country, and what with the discipline of the rector's presence, the sobering effect wrought by the shock to pride and habit, and the unwonted brain exercise of the conversation, the demon in Henslowe had been for the moment most strangely tamed after half an hour's talk. Actually some reminiscences of his old ways of speech and thought, the ways of the once prosperous and self-reliant man of business, had reappeared in him before the end of it, called out by the subtle influence of a manner which always attracted to the surface whatever decent element there might be left in a man, and then instantly gave it a recognition which was more redeeming than either counsel or denunciation.

By the time they parted Robert had arranged with his old enemy that he should become his surety with a rich cousin in Churton, who, always supposing there were no risk in the matter, and that benevolence ran

on all-fours with security of investment, was prepared to shield the credit of the family by the advance of a sufficient sum of money to rescue the ex-agent from his most pressing difficulties. He had also wrung from him the promise to see a specialist in London — Robert writing that evening to make the appointment.

How had it been done? Neither Robert nor Henslowe ever quite knew. Henslowe walked home in a bewilderment which for once had nothing to do with brandy, but was simply the result of a moral shock acting on what was still human in the man's debased consciousness, just as electricity acts on the bodily frame.

Robert, on the other hand, saw him depart with a singular lightening of mood. What he seemed to have achieved might turn out to be the merest moonshine. At any rate, the incident had appeased in him a kind of spiritual hunger — the hunger to escape a while from that incessant process of destructive analysis with which the mind was still beset, into some use of energy, more positive, human, and beneficent.

The following day was one long trial of endurance for Elsmere and for Catherine. She pleaded to go, promising quietly to keep out of his sight, and they started together — a miserable pair.

Crowds, heat, decorations, the grandees on the platform, and conspicuous among them the squire's slouching frame and striking head, side by side with a white and radiant Lady Helen — the outer success, the inner revolt and pain — and the constant seeking of his truant eyes for a face that hid itself as much as possible in dark corners, but was in truth the one thing sharply

present to him — these were the sort of impressions that remained with Elsmere afterwards of this last meeting with his people.

He had made a speech, of which he never could remember a word. As he sat down, there had been a slight flutter of surprise in the sympathetic looks of those about him, as though the tone of it had been somewhat unexpected and disproportionate to the occasion. Had he betrayed himself in any way? He looked for Catherine, but she was nowhere to be seen. Only in his search he caught the squire's ironical glance, and wondered with quick shame what sort of nonsense he had been talking.

Then a neighbouring clergyman, who had been his warm supporter and admirer from the beginning, sprang up and made a rambling panegyric on him and on his work, which Elsmere writhed under. His work! absurdity! What could be done in two years? He saw it all as the merest nothing, a ragged beginning which might do more harm than good.

But the cheering was incessant, the popular feeling intense. There was old Milsom waving a feeble arm; John Allwood, gaunt, but radiant; Mary Sharland, white still as the ribbons on her bonnet, egging on her flushed and cheering husband; and the club boys grinning and shouting, partly for love of Elsmere, mostly because to the young human animal mere noise is heaven. In front was an old hedger and ditcher, who came round the parish periodically, and never failed to take Elsmere's opinion as to 'a bit of prapperty' he and two other brothers as ancient as himself had been quarrelling over for twenty years, and were likely to

go on quarrelling over, till all three litigants had closed their eyes on a mortal scene which had afforded them on the whole vast entertainment, though little pelf. Next him was a bowed and twisted old tramp who had been shepherd in the district in his youth, had then gone through the Crimea and the Mutiny, and was now living about the commons, welcome to feed here and sleep there for the sake of his stories and his queer innocuous wit. Robert had had many a gay argumentative walk with him, and he and his companion had tramped miles to see the function, to rattle their sticks on the floor in Elsmere's honour, and satiate their curious gaze on the squire.

When all was over, Elsmere, with his wife on his arm, mounted the hill to the rectory, leaving the green behind them still crowded with folk. Once inside the shelter of their own trees, husband and wife turned instinctively and caught each other's hands. A low groan broke from Elsmere's lips; Catherine looked at him one moment, then fell weeping on his breast. The first chapter of their common life was closed.

One thing more, however, of a private nature, remained for Elsmere to do. Late in the afternoon he walked over to the Hall.

He found the squire in the inner library, among his German books, his pipe in his mouth, his old smoking-coat and slippers bearing witness to the rapidity and joy with which he had shut the world out again after the futilities of the morning. His mood was more accessible than Elsmere had yet found it since his return.

'Well, have you done with all those tomfooleries,

Elsmere? Precious eloquent speech you made! When I see you and people like you throwing yourselves at the heads of the people, I always think of Scaliger's remark about the Basques: "They say they understand one another — *I don't believe a word of it!*" All that the lower class *wants* to understand, at any rate, is the shortest way to the pockets of you and me; all that you and I need understand, according to me, is how to keep 'em off! There you have the sum and substance of *my* political philosophy.'

'You remind me,' said Robert drily, sitting down on one of the library stools, 'of some of those sentiments you expressed so forcibly on the first evening of our acquaintance.'

The squire received the shaft with equanimity.

'I was not amiable, I remember, on that occasion,' he said coolly, his thin, old man's fingers moving the while among the shelves of books, 'nor on several subsequent ones. I had been made a fool of, and you were not particularly adroit. But of course you won't acknowledge it. Who ever yet got a parson to confess himself!'

'Strangely enough, Mr. Wendover,' said Robert, fixing him with a pair of deliberate feverish eyes, 'I am here at this moment for that very purpose.'

'Go on,' said the squire, turning, however, to meet the rector's look, his gold spectacles falling forward over his long hooked nose, his attitude one of sudden attention. 'Go on.'

All his grievances against Elsmere returned to him. He stood aggressively waiting.

Robert paused a moment, and then said abruptly, —

'Perhaps even you will agree, Mr. Wendover, that I had some reason for sentiment this morning. Unless I read the lessons to-morrow, which is possible, to-day has been my last public appearance as rector of this parish!'

The squire looked at him dumbfoundered.

'And your reasons?' he said, with quick imperativeness.

Robert gave them. He admitted, as plainly and bluntly as he had done to Grey, the squire's own part in the matter; but here a note of antagonism, almost of defiance, crept even into his confession of wide and illimitable defeat. He was there, so to speak, to hand over his sword. But to the squire, his surrender had all the pride of victory.

'Why should you give up your living?' asked the squire after several minutes' complete silence.

He too had sat down, and was now bending forward, his sharp small eyes peering at his companion.

'Simply because I prefer to feel myself an honest man. However, I have not acted without advice. Grey of St. Anselm's — you know him of course — was a very close personal friend of mine at Oxford. I have been to see him, and we agreed it was the only thing to do.'

'Oh, Grey,' exclaimed the squire, with a movement of impatience. 'Grey of course wanted you to set up a church of your own, or to join his! He is like all idealists, he has the usual foolish contempt for the compromise of institutions.'

'Not at all,' said Robert calmly, 'you are mistaken; he has the most sacred respect for institutions. He

only thinks it well, and I agree with him, that with regard to a man's public profession and practice he should recognise that two and two make four.'

It was clear to him from the squire's tone and manner that Mr. Wendover's instincts on the point were very much what he had expected, the instincts of the philosophical man of the world, who scorns the notion of taking popular beliefs seriously, whether for protest or for sympathy. But he was too weary to argue. The squire, however, rose hastily and began to walk up and down in a gathering storm of irritation. The triumph gained for his own side, the tribute to his life's work, were at the moment absolutely indifferent to him. They were effaced by something else much harder to analyse. Whatever it was, it drove him to throw himself upon Robert's position with a perverse bewildering bitterness.

'Why should you break up your life in this wanton way? Who, in God's name, is injured if you keep your living? It is the business of the thinker and the scholar to clear his mind of cobwebs. Granted. You have done it. But it is also the business of the practical man to live! If I had your altruist emotional temperament, I should not hesitate for a moment. I should regard the historical expressions of an eternal tendency in men as wholly indifferent to me. If I understand you aright, you have flung away the sanctions of orthodoxy. There is no other in the way. Treat words as they deserve. *You*' — and the speaker laid an emphasis on the pronoun which for the life of him he could not help making sarcastic — '*you* will always have Gospel enough to preach.'

'I cannot,' Robert repeated quietly, unmoved by the taunt, if it was one. 'I am in a different stage, I imagine, from you. Words — that is to say, the specific Christian formulæ — may be indifferent to you, though a month or two ago I should hardly have guessed it; they are just now anything but indifferent to me.'

The squire's brow grew darker. He took up the argument again, more pugnaciously than ever. It was the strangest attempt ever made to gibe and flout a wandering sheep back into the fold. Robert's resentment was roused at last. The squire's temper seemed to him totally inexplicable, his arguments contradictory, the conversation useless and irritating. He got up to take his leave.

'What you are about to do, Elsmere,' the squire wound up with saturnine emphasis, 'is a piece of *cowardice!* You will live bitterly to regret the haste and the unreason of it.'

'There has been no haste,' exclaimed Robert, in the low tone of passionate emotion; 'I have not rooted up the most sacred growths of life as a careless child devastates its garden. There are some things which a man only does because he *must*.'

There was a pause. Robert held out his hand. The squire would hardly touch it. Outwardly his mood was one of the strangest eccentricity and anger; and as to what was beneath it, Elsmere's quick divination was dulled by worry and fatigue. It only served him so far that at the door he turned back, hat in hand, and said, looking lingeringly the while at the solitary sombre figure, at the great library, with all its suggestive

and exquisite detail: 'If Monday is fine, Squire, will you walk?'

The squire made no reply except by another question.

'Do you still keep to your Swiss plans for next week?' he asked sharply.

'Certainly. The plan, as it happens, is a godsend. But there,' said Robert, with a sigh, 'let me explain the details of this dismal business to you on Monday. I have hardly the courage for it now.'

The curtain dropped behind him. Mr. Wendover stood a minute looking after him; then, with some vehement expletive or other, walked up to his writing-table, drew some folios that were lying on it towards him, with hasty maladroit movements which sent his papers flying over the floor, and plunged doggedly into work.

He and Mrs. Darcy dined alone. After dinner the squire leant against the mantelpiece sipping his coffee, more gloomily silent than even his sister had seen him for weeks. And, as always happened when he became more difficult and morose, she became more childish. She was now wholly absorbed with a little electric toy she had just bought for Mary Elsmere, a number of infinitesimal little figures dancing fantastically under the stimulus of an electric current, generated by the simplest means. She hung over it absorbed, calling to her brother every now and then, as though by sheer perversity, to come and look whenever the pink or the blue *danseuse* executed a more surprising somersault than usual.

He took not the smallest spoken notice of her, though his eyes followed her contemptuously as she moved from window to window with her toy in pursuit of the fading light.

'Oh, Roger,' she called presently, still throwing herself to this side and that, to catch new views of her pith puppets, 'I have got something to show you. You must admire them — you shall! I have been drawing them all day, and they are nearly done. You remember what I told you once about my "imps"? I have seen them all my life, since I was a child in France with papa, and I have never been able to draw them till the last few weeks. They are such dears — such darlings; every one will know them when he sees them! There is the Chinese imp, the low smirking creature, you know, that sits on the edge of your cup of tea; there is the flipperty-flopperty creature that flies out at you when you open a drawer; there is the twisty-twirly person that sits jeering on the edge of your hat when it blows away from you; and' — her voice dropped — 'that *ugly, ugly* thing I always see waiting for me on the top of a gate. They have teased me all my life, and now at *last* I have drawn them. If they were to take offence to-morrow I should have them — the beauties — all safe.'

She came towards him, her *bizarre* little figure swaying from side to side, her eyes glittering, her restless hands pulling at the lace round her blanched head and face. The squire, his hands behind him, looked at her frowning, an involuntary horror dawning on his dark countenance, turned abruptly, and left the room.

Mr. Wendover worked till midnight; then, tired out, he turned to the bit of fire to which, in spite of the oppressiveness of the weather, the chilliness of age and nervous strain had led him to set alight. He sat there for long, sunk in the blackest reverie. He was the only living creature in the great library wing which spread around and above him — the only waking creature in the whole vast pile of Murewell. The silver lamps shone with a steady melancholy light on the chequered walls of books. The silence was a silence that could be felt; and the gleaming Artemis, the tortured frowning Medusa, were hardly stiller in their frozen calm than the crouching figure of the squire.

So Elsmere was going! In a few weeks the rectory would be once more tenanted by one of those nonentities the squire had either patronised or scorned all his life. The park, the lanes, the room in which he sits, will know that spare young figure, that animated voice, no more. The outlet which had brought so much relief and stimulus to his own mental powers is closed; the friendship on which he had unconsciously come to depend so much is broken before it had well begun.

All sorts of strange thwarted instincts make themselves felt in the squire. The wife he had once thought to marry, the children he might have had, come to sit like ghosts with him beside the fire. He had never, like Augustine, 'loved to love'; he had only loved to know. But none of us escapes to the last the yearnings which make us men. The squire becomes conscious that certain fibres he had thought long since dead in him had been all the while twining themselves silently round the disciple who had shown him in many re-

spects such a filial consideration and confidence. That young man might have become to him the son of his old age, the one human being from whom, as weakness of mind and body break him down, even his indomitable spirit might have accepted the sweetness of human pity, the comfort of human help.

And it is his own hand which has done most to break the nascent slowly-forming tie. He has bereft himself.

With what incredible recklessness had he been acting all these months!

It was the *levity* of his own proceeding which stared him in the face. His rough hand had closed on the delicate wings of a soul as a boy crushes the butterfly he pursues. As Elsmere had stood looking back at him from the library door, the suffering which spoke in every line of that changed face had stirred a sudden troubled remorse in Roger Wendover. It was mere justice that one result of that suffering should be to leave himself forlorn.

He had been thinking and writing of religion, of the history of ideas, all his life. Had he ever yet grasped the meaning of religion *to the religious man? God and faith* — what have these venerable ideas ever mattered to him personally, except as the subjects of the most ingenious analysis, the most delicate historical inductions? Not only sceptical to the core, but constitutionally indifferent, the squire had always found enough to make life amply worth living in the mere dissection of other men's beliefs.

But to-night! The unexpected shock of feeling, mingled with the terrible sense, periodically alive in him, of physical doom, seems to have stripped from

the thorny soul its outer defences of mental habit. He sees once more the hideous spectacle of his father's death, his own black half-remembered moments of warning, the teasing horror of his sister's increasing weakness of brain. Life has been on the whole a burden, though there has been a certain joy no doubt in the fierce intellectual struggle of it. And to-night it seems so nearly over! A cold prescience of death creeps over the squire as he sits in the lamplit silence. His eye seems to be actually penetrating the eternal vastness which lies about our life. He feels himself old, feeble, alone. The awe, the terror, which are at the root of all religions, have fallen even upon him at last.

The fire burns lower, the night wears on; outside, an airless, misty moonlight lies over park and field. Hark! was that a sound upstairs, in one of those silent empty rooms?

The squire half-rises, one hand on his chair, his blanched face strained, listening. Again! Is it a footstep or simply a delusion of the ear? He rises, pushes aside the curtains into the inner library, where the lamps have almost burnt away, creeps up the wooden stair, and into the deserted upper story.

Why was that door into the end room — his father's room — open? He had seen it closed that afternoon. No one had been there since. He stepped nearer. Was that simply a gleam of moonlight on the polished floor — confused lines of shadow thrown by the vine outside? And was that sound nothing but the stirring of the rising wind of dawn against the open casement window? Or —

*'My God!'*

The squire fled downstairs. He gained his chair again. He sat upright an instant, impressing on himself, with sardonic vindictive force, some of those truisms as to the action of mind on body, of brain-process on sensation, which it had been part of his life's work to illustrate. The philosopher had time to realise a shuddering fellowship of weakness with his kind, to see himself as a helpless instance of an inexorable law, before he fell back in his chair; a swoon, born of pitiful human terror — terror of things unseen — creeping over heart and brain.

# BOOK V

## ROSE

## CHAPTER XXXI

It was a November afternoon. London lay wrapped in rainy fog. The atmosphere was such as only a Londoner can breathe with equanimity, and the gloom was indescribable.

Meanwhile, in defiance of the Inferno outside, festal preparations were being made in a little house on Campden Hill. Lamps were lit; in the drawing-room chairs were pushed back; the piano was open, and a violin-stand towered beside it; chrysanthemums were everywhere; an invalid lady in a 'best cap' occupied the sofa; and two girls were flitting about, clearly making the last arrangements necessary for a 'musical afternoon.'

The invalid was Mrs. Leyburn, the girls, of course, Rose and Agnes. Rose at last was safely settled in her longed-for London, and an artistic company, of the sort her soul loved, was coming to tea with her.

Of Rose's summer at Burwood very little need be said. She was conscious that she had not borne it very well. She had been offhand with Mrs. Thornburgh, and had enjoyed one or two open skirmishes with Mrs. Seaton. Her whole temper had been irritating and irritable — she was perfectly aware of it. Towards her sick mother, indeed, she had controlled herself; nor, for such a restless creature, had she made a bad nurse. But Agnes had endured much, and found it all the harder because she was so totally in the dark as to the whys and wherefores of her sister's moods.

Rose herself would have scornfully denied that any whys and wherefores — beyond her rooted dislike of Whindale — existed. Since her return from Berlin, and especially since that moment when, as she was certain, Mr. Langham had avoided her and Catherine at the National Gallery, she had been calmly certain of her own heart-wholeness. Berlin had developed her precisely as she had desired that it might. The necessities of the Bohemian student's life had trained her to a new independence and shrewdness, and in her own opinion she was now a woman of the world judging all things by pure reason.

Oh, of course, she understood him perfectly. In the first place, at the time of their first meeting she had been a mere bread-and-butter miss, the easiest of preys for any one who might wish to get a few hours' amusement and distraction out of her temper and caprices. In the next place, even supposing he had been ever inclined to fall in love with her, which her new sardonic fairness of mind obliged her to regard as entirely doubtful, he was a man to whom marriage was impossible. How could any one expect such a superfine dreamer to turn bread-winner for a wife and household? Imagine Mr. Langham interviewed by a rate-collector or troubled about coals! As to her — simply — she had misunderstood the laws of the game. It was a little bitter to have to confess it; a little bitter that he should have seen it, and have felt reluctantly compelled to recall the facts to her. But, after all, most girls have some young follies to blush over.

So far the little cynic would get, becoming rather more scarlet, however, over the process of reflexion

than was quite compatible with the ostentatious worldly wisdom of it. Then a sudden inward restlessness would break through, and she would spend a passionate hour pacing up and down, and hungering for the moment when she might avenge upon herself and him the week of silly friendship he had found it necessary as her elder and monitor to cut short!

In September came the news of Robert's resignation of his living. Mother and daughters sat looking at each other over the letter, stupefied. That this calamity, of all others, should have fallen on Catherine, of all women! Rose said very little, and presently jumped up with shining excited eyes, and ran out for a walk with Bob, leaving Agnes to console their tearful and agitated mother. When she came in she went singing about the house as usual. Agnes, who was moved by the news out of all her ordinary *sangfroid*, was outraged by what seemed to her Rose's callousness. *She* wrote a letter to Catherine, which Catherine put among her treasures, so strangely unlike it was to the quiet indifferent Agnes of every day. Rose spent a morning over an attempt at a letter, which when it reached its destination only wounded Catherine by its constraint and convention.

And yet that same night, when the child was alone, suddenly some phrase of Catherine's letter recurred to her. She *saw*, as only imaginative people see, with every detail visualised, her sister's suffering, her sister's struggle that was to be. She jumped into bed, and, stifling all sounds under the clothes, cried herself to sleep, which did not prevent her next morning from harbouring somewhere at the bottom of her, a wicked

and furtive satisfaction that Catherine might now learn there were more opinions in the world than one.

As for the rest of the valley, Mrs. Leyburn soon passed from bewailing to a plaintive indignation with Robert, which was a relief to her daughters. It seemed to her a reflexion on 'Richard' that Robert should have behaved so. Church opinions had been good enough for 'Richard.' 'The young men seem to think, my dears, their fathers were all fools!'

The vicar, good man, was sincerely distressed, but sincerely confident, also, that in time Elsmere would find his way back into the fold. In Mrs. Thornburgh's dismay there was a secret superstitious pang. Perhaps she had better not have meddled. Perhaps it was never well to meddle. One event bears many readings, and the tragedy of Catherine Elsmere's life took shape in the uneasy consciousness of the vicar's spouse as a more or less sharp admonition against wilfulness in match-making.

Of course Rose had her way as to wintering in London. They came up in the middle of October while the Elsmeres were still abroad, and settled into a small house in Lerwick Gardens, Campden Hill, which Catherine had secured for them on her way through town to the Continent.

As soon as Mrs. Leyburn had been made comfortable, Rose set to work to look up her friends. She owed her acquaintance in London hitherto mainly to Mr. and Mrs. Pierson, the young barrister and his æsthetic wife whom she had originally met and made friends with in a railway-carriage. Mr. Pierson was bustling and shrewd; not made of the finest clay, yet not at all

a bad fellow. His wife, the daughter of a famous Mrs. Leo Hunter of a bygone generation, was small, untidy, and in all matters of religious or political opinion 'emancipated' to an extreme. She had also a strong vein of inherited social ambition, and she and her husband welcomed Rose with greater effusion than ever, in proportion as she was more beautiful and more indisputably gifted than ever. They placed themselves and their house at the girl's service, partly out of genuine admiration and good-nature, partly also because they divined in her a profitable social appendage.

For the Piersons, socially, were still climbing, and had by no means attained. Their world, so far, consisted too much of the odds and ends of most other worlds. They were not satisfied with it, and the friendship of the girl-violinist, whose vivacious beauty and artistic gift made a stir wherever she went, was a very welcome addition to their resources. They fêted her in their own house; they took her to the houses of other people; society smiled on Miss Leyburn's protectors more than it had ever smiled on Mr. and Mrs. Pierson taken alone; and meanwhile Rose, flushed, excited, and totally unsuspicious, thought the world a fairy-tale, and lived from morning till night in a perpetual din of music, compliments, and bravos, which seemed to her life indeed — life at last!

With the beginning of November the Elsmeres returned, and about the same time Rose began to project tea-parties of her own, to which Mrs. Leyburn gave a flurried assent. When the invitations were written, Rose sat staring at them a little, pen in hand.

'I wonder what Catherine will say to some of these

people!' she remarked in a dubious voice to Agnes. 'Some of them are queer, I admit; but, after all, those two superior persons will have to get used to my friends sometime, and they may as well begin.'

'You cannot expect poor Cathie to come,' said Agnes with sudden energy.

Rose's eyebrows went up. Agnes resented her ironical expression, and with a word or two of quite unusual sharpness got up and went.

Rose, left alone, sprang up suddenly, and clasped her white fingers above her head, with a long breath.

'Where my heart used to be there is now just — a black — cold — cinder,' she remarked with sarcastic emphasis. 'I am sure I used to be a nice girl once, but it is so long ago I can't remember it!'

She stayed so a minute or more; then two tears suddenly broke and fell. She dashed them angrily away, and sat down again to her note-writing.

Amongst the cards she had still to fill up was one of which the envelope was addressed to the Hon. Hugh Flaxman, 90 St. James's Place. Lady Charlotte, though she had afterwards again left town, had been in Martin Street at the end of October. The Leyburns had lunched there, and had been introduced by her to her nephew, and Lady Helen's brother, Mr. Flaxman. The girls had found him agreeable; he had called the week afterwards when they were not at home; and Rose now carelessly sent him a card, with the inward reflexion that he was much too great a man to come, and was probably enjoying himself at country-houses, as every aristocrat should, in November.

The following day the two girls made their way over

to Bedford Square, where the Elsmeres had taken a house in order to be near the British Museum. They pushed their way upstairs through a medley of packing-cases, and a sickening smell of paint. There was a sound of an opening door, and a gentleman stepped out of the back room, which was to be Elsmere's study, on to the landing.

It was Edward Langham. He and Rose stood and stared at each other a moment. Then Rose in the coolest, lightest voice introduced him to Agnes. Agnes, with one curious glance, took in her sister's defiant smiling ease and the stranger's embarrassment; then she went on to find Catherine. The two left behind exchanged a few *banal* questions and answers. Langham had only allowed himself one look at the dazzling face and eyes framed in fur cap and boa. Afterwards he stood making a study of the ground, and answering her remarks in his usual stumbling fashion. What was it had gone out of her voice — simply the soft callow sounds of first youth? And what a personage she had grown in these twelve months — how formidably, consciously brilliant in look and dress and manner!

Yes, he was still in town — settled there, indeed, for some time. And she — was there any special day on which Mrs. Leyburn received visitors? He asked the question, of course with various hesitations and circumlocutions.

'Oh dear, yes! Will you come next Wednesday, for instance, and inspect a musical menagerie? The animals will go through their performances from four till seven. And I can answer for it that some of the specimens will be entirely new to you.'

The prospect offered could hardly have been more repellent to him, but he got out an acceptance somehow. She nodded lightly to him and passed on, and he went downstairs, his head in a whirl. Where had the crude pretty child of yester-year departed to — impulsive, conceited, readily offended, easily touched, sensitive as to what all the world might think of her and her performances? The girl he had just left had counted all her resources, tried the edge of all her weapons, and knew her own place too well to ask for anybody else's appraisement. What beauty — good heavens! — what *aplomb!* The rich husband Elsmere talked of would hardly take much waiting for.

So cogitating, Langham took his way westward to his Beaumont Street rooms. They were on the second floor, small, dingy, choked with books. Ordinarily he shut the door behind him with a sigh of content. This evening they seemed to him intolerably confined and stuffy. He thought of going out to his club and a concert, but did nothing, after all, but sit brooding over the fire till midnight, alternately hugging and hating his solitude.

And so we return to the Wednesday following this unexpected meeting.

The drawing-room at No. 27 was beginning to fill. Rose stood at the door receiving the guests as they flowed in, while Agnes in the background dispensed tea. She was discussing with herself the probability of Langham's appearance. 'Whom shall I introduce him to first?' she pondered, while she shook hands. 'The poet? I see mamma is now struggling with him.

The 'cellist with the hair — or the lady in Greek dress — or the esoteric Buddhist? What a fascinating selection! I had really no notion we should be quite so curious!'

'Mees Rose, they vait for you,' said a charming golden-bearded young German, viola in hand, bowing before her. He and his kind were most of them in love with her already, and all the more so because she knew so well how to keep them at a distance.

She went off, beckoning to Agnes to take her place, and the quartette began. The young German aforesaid played the viola, while the 'cello was divinely played by a Hungarian, of whose outer man it need only be said that in wild profusion of much-tortured hair, in Hebraism of feature, and swarthy smoothness of cheek, he belonged to that type which Nature would seem to have already used to excess in the production of the Continental musician. Rose herself was violinist, and the instruments dashed into the opening allegro with a precision and an *entrain* that took the room by storm.

In the middle of it, Langham pushed his way into the crowd round the drawing-room door. Through the heads about him, he could see her standing a little in advance of the others, her head turned to one side, really in the natural attitude of violin-playing, but, as it seemed to him, in a kind of ravishment of listening — cheeks flushed, eyes shining, and the right arm and high-curved wrist managing the bow with a grace born of knowledge and fine training.

'Very much improved, eh?' said an English professional to a German neighbour, lifting his eyebrows interrogatively.

The other nodded with the business-like air of one who knows. 'Joachim, they say, *war darüber entzückt*, and did his best vid her, and now D—— has got her' —naming a famous violinist — 'she vill make fast brogress. He vill schtamp upon her treecks!'

'But will she ever be more than a very clever amateur? Too pretty, eh?' And the questioner nudged his companion, dropping his voice.

Langham would have given worlds to get on into the room, over the prostrate body of the speaker by preference, but the laws of mass and weight had him at their mercy, and he was rooted to the spot.

The other shrugged his shoulders. 'Vell, vid a bretty woman — *überhaupt* — it *dos n't* mean business! It's zoziety — the dukes and the duchesses — that ruins all the yong talents.'

This whispered conversation went on during the andante. With the scherzo the two hirsute faces broke into broad smiles. The artist behind each woke up, and Langham heard no more, except guttural sounds of delight and quick notes of technical criticism.

How that scherzo danced and coquetted, and how the presto flew as though all the winds were behind it, chasing its mad eddies of notes through listening space! At the end, amid a wild storm of applause, she laid down her violin, and, proudly smiling, her breast still heaving with excitement and exertion, received the praises of those crowding round her. The group round the door was precipitated forward, and Langham with it. She saw him in a moment. Her white brow contracted, and she gave him a quick but hardly smiling glance of recognition through the crowd. He thought

there was no chance of getting at her, and moved aside amid the general hubbub to look at a picture.

'Mr. Langham, how do you do?'

He turned sharply and found her beside him. She had come to him with malice in her heart — malice born of smart and long smouldering pain; but as she caught his look, the look of the nervous short-sighted scholar and recluse, as her glance swept over the delicate refinement of the face, a sudden softness quivered in her own. The game was so defenceless!

'You will find nobody here you know,' she said abruptly, a little under her breath. 'I am morally certain you never saw a single person in the room before! Shall I introduce you?'

'Delighted, of course. But don't disturb yourself about me, Miss Leyburn. I come out of my hole so seldom, everything amuses me — but especially looking and listening.'

'Which means,' she said, with frank audacity, 'that you dislike new people!'

His eye kindled at once. 'Say rather that it means a preference for the people that are not new! There is such a thing as concentrating one's attention. I came to hear you play, Miss Leyburn!'

'Well?'

She glanced at him from under her long lashes, one hand playing with the rings on the other. He thought, suddenly, with a sting of regret, of the confiding child who had flushed under his praise that Sunday evening at Murewell.

'Superb!' he said, but half-mechanically. 'I had no notion a winter's work would have done so much for

you. Was Berlin as stimulating as you expected? When I heard you had gone, I said to myself — "Well, at least, now, there is one completely happy person in Europe!" '

'Did you? How easily we all dogmatise about each other!' she said scornfully. Her manner was by no means simple. He did not feel himself at all at ease with her. His very embarrassment, however, drove him into rashness, as often happens.

'I thought I had enough to go upon!' he said in another tone; and his black eyes, sparkling as though a film had dropped from them, supplied the reference his words forbore.

She turned away from him with a perceptible drawing up of the whole figure.

'Will you come and be introduced?' she asked him coldly. He bowed as coldly and followed her. Wholesome resentment of her manner was denied him. He *had* asked for her friendship, and had then gone away and forgotten her. Clearly what she meant him to see now was that they were strangers again. Well, she was amply in her right. He suspected that his allusion to their first talk over the fire had not been unwelcome to her, as an opportunity.

And he had actually debated whether he should come, lest in spite of himself she might beguile him once more into those old lapses of will and common sense! Coxcomb!

He made a few spasmodic efforts at conversation with the lady to whom she had introduced him, then awkwardly disengaged himself and went to stand in a corner and study his neighbours.

Close to him, he found, was the poet of the party, got up in the most correct professional costume — long hair, velvet coat, eye-glass and all. His extravagance, however, was of the most conventional type. Only his vanity had a touch of the sublime. Langham, who possessed a sort of fine-ear gift for catching conversation, heard him saying to an open-eyed *ingénue* beside him, —

'Oh, my literary baggage is small as yet. I have only done, perhaps, three things that will live.'

'Oh, Mr. Wood!' said the maiden, mildly protesting against so much modesty.

He smiled, thrusting his hand into the breast of the velvet coat. 'But then,' he said, in a tone of the purest candour, 'at my age I don't think Shelley had done more!'

Langham, who, like all shy men, was liable to occasional explosions, was seized with a convulsive fit of coughing, and had to retire from the neighbourhood of the bard, who looked round him, disturbed and slightly frowning.

At last he discovered a point of view in the back room whence he could watch the humours of the crowd without coming too closely in contact with them. What a miscellaneous collection it was! He began to be irritably jealous for Rose's place in the world. She ought to be more adequately surrounded than this. What was Mrs. Leyburn — what were the Elsmeres about? He rebelled against the thought of her living perpetually among her inferiors, the centre of a vulgar publicity, queen of the second-rate.

It provoked him that she should be amusing herself

so well. Her laughter, every now and then, came ringing into the back room. And presently there was a general hubbub. Langham craned his neck forward, and saw a struggle going on over a roll of music, between Rose and the long-haired, long-nosed violoncellist. Evidently she did not want to play some particular piece, and wished to put it out of sight. Whereupon the Hungarian, who had been clamouring for it, rushed to its rescue, and there was a mock fight over it. At last, amid the applause of the room, Rose was beaten, and her conqueror, flourishing the music on high, executed a kind of *pas seul* of triumph.

'*Victoria!*' he cried. 'Now denn for de conditions of peace. Mees Rose, vill you kindly tune up? You are as moch beaten as the French at Sedan.'

'Not a stone of my fortresses, not an inch of my territory!' said Rose, with fine emphasis, crossing her white wrists before her.

The Hungarian looked at her, the wild poetic strain in him which was the strain of race asserting itself.

'But if de victor bows,' he said, dropping on one knee before her. 'If force lay down his spoils at de feet of beauty?'

The circle round them applauded hotly, the touch of theatricality finding immediate response. Langham was remorselessly conscious of the man's absurd *chevelure* and ill-fitting clothes. But Rose herself had evidently nothing but relish for the scene. Proudly smiling, she held out her hand for her property, and as soon as she had it safe, she whisked it into the open drawer of a cabinet standing near, and drawing out the key, held it up a moment in her taper fingers, and

then, depositing it in a little velvet bag hanging at her girdle, she closed the snap upon it with a little vindictive wave of triumph. Every movement was graceful, rapid, effective.

Half a dozen German throats broke into guttural protest. Amid the storm of laughter and remonstrance, the door suddenly opened. The fluttered parlour-maid mumbled a long name, and, with a port of soldierly uprightness, there advanced behind her a large fair-haired woman, followed by a gentleman, and in the distance by another figure.

Rose drew back a moment astounded, one hand on the piano, her dress sweeping round her. An awkward silence fell on the chattering circle of musicians.

'Good heavens!' said Langham to himself, 'Lady Charlotte Wynnstay!'

'How do you do, Miss Leyburn?' said one of the most piercing of voices. 'Are you surprised to see me? You did n't ask me — perhaps you don't want me. But I have come, you see, partly because my nephew was coming,' and she pointed to the gentleman behind her, 'partly because I meant to punish you for not having come to see me last Thursday. Why did n't you?'

'Because we thought you were still away,' said Rose, who had by this time recovered her self-possession. 'But if you meant to punish me, Lady Charlotte, you have done it badly. I am delighted to see you. May I introduce my sister? Agnes, will you find Lady Charlotte Wynnstay a chair by mamma?'

'Oh, you wish, I see, to dispose of me at once,' said the other imperturbably. 'What is happening? Is it music?'

'Aunt Charlotte, that is most disingenuous on your part. I gave you ample warning.'

Rose turned a smiling face towards the speaker. It was Mr. Flaxman, Lady Charlotte's companion.

'You need not have drawn the picture too black, Mr. Flaxman. There is an escape. If Lady Charlotte will only let my sister take her into the next room, she will find herself well out of the clutches of the music. Oh, Robert! Here you are at last! Lady Charlotte, you remember my brother-in-law? Robert, will you get Lady Charlotte some tea?'

'*I* am not going to be banished,' said Mr. Flaxman, looking down upon her, his well-bred, slightly worn face aglow with animation and pleasure.

'Then you will be deafened,' said Rose, laughing, as she escaped from him a moment, to arrange for a song from a tall formidable maiden, built after the fashion of Mr. Gilbert's contralto heroines, with a voice which bore out the ample promise of her frame.

'Your sister is a terribly self-possessed young person, Mr. Elsmere,' said Lady Charlotte, as Robert piloted her across the room.

'Does that imply praise or blame on your part, Lady Charlotte?' asked Robert, smiling.

'Neither at present. I don't know Miss Leyburn well enough. I merely state a fact. No tea, Mr. Elsmere. I have had three teas already, and I am not like the American woman who could always worry down another cup.'

She was introduced to Mrs. Leyburn; but the plaintive invalid was immediately seized with terror of her voice and appearance, and was infinitely grateful to

Robert for removing her as promptly as possible to a chair on the border of the two rooms where she could talk or listen as she pleased. For a few moments she listened to Fräulein Adelmann's veiled unmanageable contralto; then she turned magisterially to Robert standing behind her.

'The art of singing has gone out,' she declared, 'since the Germans have been allowed to meddle in it. By the way, Mr. Elsmere, how do you manage to be here? Are you taking a holiday?'

Robert looked at her with a start.

'I have left Murewell, Lady Charlotte.'

'Left Murewell!' she said in astonishment, turning round to look at him, her eye-glass in her eye. 'Why has Helen told me nothing about it? Have you got another living?'

'No. My wife and I are settling in London. We only told Lady Helen of our intentions a few weeks ago.'

To which it may be added that Lady Helen, touched and dismayed by Elsmere's letter to her, had not been very eager to hand over the woes of her friends to her aunt's cool and irresponsible comments.

Lady Charlotte deliberately looked at him a minute longer through her glass. Then she let it fall.

'You don't mean to tell me any more, I can see, Mr. Elsmere. But you will allow me to be astonished?'

'Certainly,' he said, smiling sadly, and immediately afterwards relapsing into silence.

'Have you heard of the squire lately?' he asked her after a pause.

'Not from him. We are excellent friends when we

meet, but he does n't consider me worth writing to. His sister — little idiot — writes to me every now and then. But she has not vouchsafed me a letter since the summer. I should say from the last accounts that he was breaking.'

'He had a mysterious attack of illness just before I left,' said Robert gravely. 'It made one anxious.'

'Oh, it is the old story. All the Wendovers have died of weak hearts or queer brains — generally of both together. I imagine you had some experience of the squire's queerness at one time, Mr. Elsmere. I can't say you and he seemed to be on particularly good terms on the only occasion I ever had the pleasure of meeting you at Murewell.'

She looked up at him, smiling grimly. She had a curiously exact memory for the unpleasant scenes of life.

'Oh, you remember that unlucky evening!' said Robert, reddening a little. 'We soon got over that. We became great friends.'

Again, however, Lady Charlotte was struck by the quiet melancholy of his tone. How strangely the look of youth — which had been so attractive in him the year before — had ebbed from the man's face — from complexion, eyes, expression! She stared at him, full of a brusque tormenting curiosity as to the how and why.

'I hope there is some one among you strong enough to manage Miss Rose,' she said presently, with an abrupt change of subject. 'That little sister-in-law of yours is going to be the rage.'

'Heaven forbid!' cried Robert fervently.

'Heaven will do nothing of the kind. She is twice as pretty as she was last year; I am told she plays twice as well. She had always the sort of manner that provoked people one moment and charmed them the next. And, to judge by my few words with her just now, I should say she had developed it finely. Well, now, Mr. Elsmere, who is going to take care of her?'

'I suppose we shall all have a try at it, Lady Charlotte.'

'Her mother does n't look to me a person of nerve enough,' said Lady Charlotte coolly. 'She is a girl certain — absolutely certain — to have adventures, and you may as well be prepared for them.'

'I can only trust she will disappoint your expectations, Lady Charlotte,' said Robert, with a slightly sarcastic emphasis.

'Elsmere, who is that man talking to Miss Leyburn?' asked Langham as the two friends stood side by side, a little later, watching the spectacle.

'A certain Mr. Flaxman, brother to a pretty little neighbour of ours in Surrey — Lady Helen Varley — and nephew to Lady Charlotte. I have not seen him here before; but I think the girls like him.'

'Is he the Flaxman who got the mathematical prize at Berlin last year?'

'Yes, I believe so. A striking person altogether. He is enormously rich, Lady Helen tells me, in spite of an elder brother. All the money in his mother's family has come to him, and he is the heir to Lord Daniel's great Derbyshire property. Twelve years ago I used to hear him talked about incessantly by the Cambridge

men one met. "Citizen Flaxman" they called him, for his opinions' sake. He would ask his scout to dinner, and insist on dining with his own servants, and shaking hands with his friends' butlers. The scouts and the butlers put an end to that, and altogether, I imagine, the world disappointed him. He has a story, poor fellow, too — a young wife, who died with her first baby ten years ago. The world supposes him never to have got over it, which makes him all the more interesting. A distinguished face, don't you think? — the good type of English aristocrat.'

Langham assented. But his attention was fixed on the group in which Rose's bright hair was conspicuous; and when Robert left him and went to amuse Mrs. Leyburn, he still stood rooted to the same spot watching. Rose was leaning against the piano, one hand behind her, her whole attitude full of a young, easy, self-confident grace. Mr. Flaxman was standing beside her, and they were deep in talk — serious talk apparently, to judge by her quiet manner and the charmed attentive interest of his look. Occasionally, however, there was a sally on her part, and an answering flash of laughter on his; but the stream of conversation closed immediately over the interruption, and flowed on as evenly as before.

Unconsciously Langham retreated farther and farther into the comparative darkness of the inner room. He felt himself singularly insignificant and out of place, and he made no more efforts to talk. Rose played a violin solo, and played it with astonishing delicacy and fire. When it was over Langham saw her turn from the applauding circle crowding in upon her and throw a

smiling interrogative look over her shoulder at Mr. Flaxman. Mr. Flaxman bent over her, and as he spoke Langham caught her flush, and the excited sparkle of her eyes. Was this the 'some one in the stream'? No doubt — no doubt!

When the party broke up Langham found himself borne towards the outer room, and before he knew where he was going he was standing beside her.

'Are *you* here still?' she said to him, startled, as he held out his hand. He replied by some comments on the music, a little lumbering and infelicitous, as all his small-talk was. She hardly listened, but presently she looked up nervously, compelled as it were by the great melancholy eyes above her.

'We are not always in this turmoil, Mr. Langham. Perhaps some other day you will come and make friends with my mother?'

## CHAPTER XXXII

NATURALLY, it was during their two months of autumn travel that Elsmere and Catherine first realised in detail what Elsmere's act was to mean to them, as husband and wife, in the future. Each left England with the most tender and heroic resolves. And no one who knows anything of life will need to be told that even for these two finely-natured people such resolves were infinitely easier to make than to carry out.

'I will not preach to you — I will not persecute you!' Catherine had said to her husband at the moment of her first shock and anguish. And she did her utmost, poor thing, to keep her word! All through the innumerable bitternesses which accompanied Elsmere's withdrawal from Murewell — the letters which followed them, the remonstrances of public and private friends, the paragraphs which found their way, do what they would, into the newspapers — the pain of deserting, as it seemed to her, certain poor and helpless folk who had been taught to look to her and Robert, and whose bewildered lamentations came to them through young Armitstead — through all this she held her peace; she did her best to soften Robert's grief; she never once reproached him with her own.

But at the same time the inevitable separation of their inmost hopes and beliefs had thrown her back on herself, had immensely strengthened that Puritan independent fibre in her which her youth had developed,

and which her happy marriage had only temporarily masked, not weakened. Never had Catherine believed so strongly and intensely as now, when the husband, who had been the guide and inspirer of her religious life, had given up the old faith and practices. By virtue of a kind of nervous instinctive dread, his relaxations bred increased rigidity in her. Often when she was alone — or at night — she was seized with a lonely, an awful sense of responsibility. Oh! let her guard her faith, not only for her own sake, her child's, her Lord's, but for *his* — that it might be given to her patience at last to lead him back.

And the only way in which it seemed to her possible to guard it was to set up certain barriers of silence. She feared that fiery persuasive quality in Robert she had so often seen at work on other people. With him conviction was life — it was the man himself, to an extraordinary degree. How was she to resist the pressure of those new ardours with which his mind was filling — she who loved him! — except by building, at any rate for the time, an enclosure of silence round her Christian beliefs? It was in some ways a pathetic repetition of the situation between Robert and the squire in the early days of their friendship, but in Catherine's mind there was no troubling presence of new knowledge conspiring from within with the forces without. At this moment of her life she was more passionately convinced than ever that the only knowledge truly worth having in this world was the knowledge of God's mercies in Christ.

So gradually with a gentle persistency she withdrew certain parts of herself from Robert's ken; she avoided

certain subjects, or anything that might lead to them; she ignored the religious and philosophical books he was constantly reading; she prayed and thought alone — always for him, of him — but still resolutely alone. It was impossible, however, that so great a change in their life could be effected without a perpetual sense of breaking links, a perpetual series of dumb wounds and griefs on both sides. There came a moment when, as he sat alone one evening in a pine wood above the Lake of Geneva, Elsmere suddenly awoke to the conviction that in spite of all his efforts and illusions, their relation to each other *was* altering, dwindling, impoverishing: the terror of that summer night at Murewell was being dismally justified.

His own mind during this time was in a state of perpetual discovery, 'sailing the seas where there was never sand' — the vast shadowy seas of speculative thought. All his life, reserve to those nearest to him had been pain and grief to him. He was one of those people, as we know, who throw off readily; to whom sympathy, expansion, are indispensable; who suffer physically and mentally from anything cold and rigid beside them. And now, at every turn, in their talk, their reading, in many of the smallest details of their common existence, Elsmere began to feel the presence of this cold and rigid something. He was ever conscious of self-defence on her side, of pained drawing back on his. And with every succeeding effort of his at self-repression, it seemed to him as though fresh nails were driven into the coffin of that old free habit of perfect confidence which had made the heaven of their life since they had been man and wife.

He sat on for long, through the September evening, pondering, wrestling. Was it simply inevitable, the natural result of his own act, and of her antecedents, to which he must submit himself, as to any mutilation or loss of power in the body? The young lover and husband rebelled — the believer rebelled — against the admission. Probably if his change had left him anchorless and forsaken, as it leaves many men, he would have been ready enough to submit, in terror lest his own forlornness should bring about hers. But in spite of the intellectual confusion, which inevitably attends any wholesale reconstruction of a man's platform of action, he had never been more sure of God, of the Divine aims of the world, than now; never more open than now, amid this exquisite Alpine world, to those passionate moments of religious trust which are man's eternal defiance to the iron silences about him. Originally, as we know, he had shrunk from the thought of change in her corresponding to his own; now that his own foothold was strengthening, his longing for a new union was overpowering that old dread. The proselytising instinct may be never quite morally defensible, even as between husband and wife. Nevertheless, in all strong, convinced, and ardent souls it exists, and must be reckoned with.

At last one evening he was overcome by a sudden impulse which neutralised for the moment his nervous dread of hurting her. Some little incident of their day together was rankling, and it was borne in upon him that almost any violent protest on her part would have been preferable to this constant soft evasion of hers, which was gradually, imperceptibly dividing heart from heart.

They were in a bare attic room at the very top of one of the huge newly-built hotels which during the last twenty years have invaded all the high places of Switzerland. The August which had been so hot in England had been rainy and broken in Switzerland. But it had been followed by a warm and mellow September, and the favourite hotels below a certain height were still full. When the Elsmeres arrived at Les Avants, this scantily furnished garret, out of which some servants had been hurried to make room for them, was all that could be found. They, however, liked it for its space and its view. They looked sideways from their windows on to the upper end of the lake, three thousand feet below them. Opposite, across the blue water, rose a grandiose rampart of mountains, the stage on which from morn till night the sun went through a long transformation scene of beauty. The water was marked every now and then by passing boats and steamers — tiny specks which served to measure the vastness of all around them. To right and left, spurs of green mountains shut out alike the lower lake and the icy splendours of the 'Valais depths profound.' What made the charm of the narrow prospect was, first, the sense it produced in the spectator of hanging dizzily above the lake, with infinite air below him, and, then, the magical effects of dawn and evening, when wreaths of mist would blot out the valley and the lake, and leave the eye of the watcher face to face across the fathomless abyss with the majestic mountain mass, and its attendant retinue of clouds, as though they and he were alone in the universe.

It was a peaceful September night. From the open

window beside him Robert could see a world of high moonlight, limited and invaded on all sides by sharp black masses of shade. A few rare lights glimmered on the spreading alp below, and every now and then a breath of music came to them wafted from a military band playing a mile or two away. They had been climbing most of the afternoon, and Catherine was lying down, her brown hair loose about her, the thin oval of her face and clear line of brow just visible in the dim candlelight.

Suddenly he stretched out his hand for his Greek Testament, which was always near him, though there had been no common reading since that bitter day of his confession to her. The mark still lay in the well-worn volume at the point reached in their last reading at Murewell. He opened upon it, and began the eleventh chapter of St. John.

Catherine trembled when she saw him take up the book. He began without preface, treating the passage before him in his usual way, — that is to say, taking verse after verse in the Greek, translating and commenting. She never spoke all through, and at last he closed the little Testament, and bent towards her, his look full of feeling.

'Catherine! can't you let me — will you never let me tell you, now, how that story — how the old things — affect me, from the new point of view? You always stop me when I try. I believe you think of me as having thrown it all away. Would it not comfort you, sometimes, if you knew that although much of the Gospels, this very raising of Lazarus, for instance, seems to me no longer true in the historical sense, still

they are always full to me of an ideal, a poetical truth? Lazarus may not have died and come to life, may never have existed; but still to me, now as always, love for Jesus of Nazareth is "resurrection" and "life."'

He spoke with the most painful diffidence, the most wistful tenderness.

There was a pause. Then Catherine said, in a rigid, constrained voice, —

'If the Gospels are not true in fact, as history, as reality, I cannot see how they are true at all, or of any value.'

The next minute she rose, and, going to the little wooden dressing-table, she began to brush out and plait for the night her straight silky veil of hair. As she passed him Robert saw her face pale and set.

He sat quiet another moment or two, and then he went towards her and took her in his arms.

'Catherine,' he said to her, his lips trembling, 'am I never to speak my mind to you any more? Do you mean always to hold me at arm's length — to refuse always to hear what I have to say in defence of the change which has cost us both so much?'

She hesitated, trying hard to restrain herself. But it was of no use. She broke into tears — quiet but most bitter tears.

'Robert, I cannot! Oh, you must see I cannot. It is not because I am hard, but because I am weak. How can I stand up against you? I dare not — I dare not. If you were not yourself — not my husband —'

Her voice dropped. Robert guessed that at the bottom of her resistance there was an intolerable fear of what love might do with her if she once gave it an open-

ing. He felt himself cruel, brutal, and yet an urgent sense of all that was at stake drove him on.

'I would not press or worry you, God knows!' he said, almost piteously, kissing her forehead as she lay against him. 'But remember, Catherine, I cannot put these things aside. I once thought I could — that I could fall back on my historical work, and leave religious matters alone as far as criticism was concerned. But I cannot. They fill my mind more and more. I feel more and more impelled to search them out, and to put my conclusions about them into shape. And all the time this is going on, are you and I to remain strangers to one another in all that concerns our truest life — are we, Catherine?'

He spoke in a low voice of intense feeling. She turned her face and pressed her lips to his hand. Both had the scene in the wood-path after her flight and return in their minds, and both were filled with a despairing sense of the difficulty of living, not through great crises, but through the detail of every day.

'Could you not work at other things?' she whispered.

He was silent, looking straight before him into the moonlit shimmer and white spectral hazes of the valley, his arms still round her.

'No!' he burst out at last; 'not till I have satisfied myself. I feel it burning within me, like a command from God, to work out the problem, to make it clearer to myself — and to others,' he added deliberately.

Her heart sank within her. The last words called up before her a dismal future of controversy and publicity, in which at every step she would be condemning her husband.

'And all this time, all these years, perhaps,' he went on — before, in her perplexity, she could find words, —'is my wife never going to let me speak freely to her? Am I to act, think, judge, without her knowledge? Is she to know less of me than a friend, less even than the public for whom I write or speak?'

It seemed intolerable to him, all the more that every moment they stood there together it was being impressed upon him that in fact this was what she meant, what she had contemplated from the beginning.

'Robert, I cannot defend myself against you,' she cried, again clinging to him. 'Oh, think for me! You know what I feel; that I dare not risk what is not mine!'

He kissed her again, and then moved away from her to the window. It began to be plain to him that his effort was merely futile, and had better not have been made. But his heart was very sore.

'Do you ever ask yourself,' he said presently, looking steadily into the night — 'no, I don't think you can, Catherine — what part the reasoning faculty, that faculty which marks us out from the animal, was meant to play in life? Did God give it to us simply that you might trample upon it and ignore it, both in yourself and me?'

She had dropped into a chair, and sat with clasped hands, her hair falling about her white dressing-gown, and framing the nobly-featured face blanched by the moonlight. She did not attempt a reply, but the melancholy of an invincible resolution, which was, so to speak, not her own doing, but rather was like a necessity imposed upon her from outside, breathed through her silence.

He turned and looked at her. She raised her arms, and the gesture reminded him for a moment of the Donatello figure in the Murewell library — the same delicate austere beauty, the same tenderness, the same underlying reserve. He took her outstretched hands and held them against his breast. His hotly-beating heart told him that he was perfectly right, and that to accept the barriers she was setting up would impoverish all their future life together. But he could not struggle with the woman on whom he had already inflicted so severe a practical trial. Moreover, he felt strangely as he stood there the danger of rousing in her those illimitable possibilities of the religious temper, the dread of which had once before risen spectre-like in his heart.

So once more he yielded. She rewarded him with all the charm, all the delightfulness, of which under the circumstances she was mistress. They wandered up the Rhone valley, through the St. Gothard, and spent a fortnight between Como and Lugano. During these days her one thought was to revive and refresh him, and he let her tend him, and lent himself to the various heroic futilities by which she would try — as part of her nursing mission — to make the future look less empty and their distress less real. Of course under all this delicate give and take both suffered; both felt that the promise of their marriage had failed them, and that they had come dismally down to a second best. But after all they were young, and the autumn was beautiful — and though they hurt each other, they were alone together and constantly, passionately, interested in each other. Italy, too, softened all things

— even Catherine's English tone and temper. As long as the delicious luxury of the Italian autumn, with all its primitive pagan suggestiveness, was still round them; as long as they were still among the cities of the Lombard plain, — that battle-ground and highway of nations, which roused all Robert's historical enthusiasm, and set him reading, discussing, thinking, in his old impetuous way, about something else than minute problems of Christian evidence, — the new-born friction between them was necessarily reduced to a minimum.

But with their return home, with their plunge into London life, the difficulties of the situation began to define themselves more sharply. In after years, one of Catherine's dreariest memories was the memory of their first instalment in the Bedford Square house. Robert's anxiety to make it pleasant and homelike was pitiful to watch. He had none of the modern passion for upholstery, and probably the vaguest notions of what was æsthetically correct. But during their furnishing days he was never tired of wandering about in search of pretty things — a rug, a screen, an engraving — which might brighten the rooms in which Catherine was to live. He would put everything in its place with a restless eagerness, and then Catherine would be called in, and would play her part bravely. She would smile and ask questions, and admire, and then when Robert had gone, she would move slowly to the window and look out at the great mass of the British Museum frowning beyond the little dingy strip of garden, with a sick longing in her heart for the Mure-

well cornfield, the wood-path, the village, the free air-bathed spaces of heath and common. Oh! this huge London, with its unfathomable poverty and its heartless wealth — how it oppressed and bewildered her! Its mere grime and squalor, its murky poisoned atmosphere, were a perpetual trial to the countrywoman brought up amid the dash of mountain streams and the scents of mountain pastures. She drooped physically for a time, as did the child.

But morally? With Catherine everything really depended on the moral state. She could have followed Robert to a London living with a joy and hope which would have completely deadened all these repulsions of the senses now so active in her. But without this inner glow, in the presence of the profound spiritual difference circumstance had developed between her and the man she loved, everything was a burden. Even her religion, though she clung to it with an ever-increasing tenacity, failed at this period to bring her much comfort. Every night it seemed to her that the day had been one long and dreary struggle to make something out of nothing; and in the morning the night, too, seemed to have been alive with conflict — *All Thy waves and Thy storms have gone over me!*

Robert guessed it all, and whatever remorseful love could do to soften such a strain and burden he tried to do. He encouraged her to find work among the poor; he tried in the tenderest ways to interest her in the great spectacle of London life which was already, in spite of yearning and regret, beginning to fascinate and absorb himself. But their standards were now so different that she was constantly shrinking from what

attracted him, or painfully judging what was to him merely curious and interesting. He was really more and more oppressed by her intellectual limitations, though never consciously would he have allowed himself to admit them, and she was more and more bewildered by what constantly seemed to her a breaking up of principle, a relaxation of moral fibre.

And the work among the poor was difficult. Robert instinctively felt that for him to offer his services in charitable work to the narrow Evangelical, whose church Catherine had joined, would have been merely to invite rebuff. So that even in the love and care of the unfortunate they were separated. For he had not yet found a sphere of work, and, if he had, Catherine's invincible impulse in these matters was always to attach herself to the authorities and powers that be. He could only acquiesce when she suggested applying to Mr. Clarendon for some charitable occupation for herself.

After her letter to him, Catherine had an interview with the vicar at his home. She was puzzled by the start and sudden pause for recollection with which he received her name, the tone of compassion which crept into his talk with her, the pitying look and grasp of the hand with which he dismissed her. Then, as she walked home, it flashed upon her that she had seen a copy, some weeks old, of the *Record* lying on the good man's table, the very copy which contained Robert's name among the list of men who during the last ten years had thrown up the Anglican ministry. The delicate face flushed miserably from brow to chin. Pitied for being Robert's wife! Oh, monstrous! — incredible!

Meanwhile Robert, man-like, in spite of all the griefs and sorenesses of the position, had immeasurably the best of it. In the first place such incessant activity of mind as his is in itself both tonic and narcotic. It was constantly generating in him fresh purposes and hopes, constantly deadening regret, and pushing the old things out of sight. He was full of many projects, literary and social, but they were all in truth the fruits of one long experimental process, the passionate attempt of the reason to justify to itself the God in whom the heart believed. Abstract thought, as Mr. Grey saw, had had comparatively little to do with Elsmere's relinquishment of the Church of England. But as soon as the Christian bases of faith were overthrown, that faith had naturally to find for itself other supports and attachments. For faith itself — in God and a spiritual order — had been so wrought into the nature by years of reverent and adoring living that nothing could destroy it. With Elsmere, as with all men of religious temperament, belief in Christianity and faith in God had not at the outset been a matter of reasoning at all, but of sympathy, feeling, association, daily experience. Then the intellect had broken in, and destroyed or transformed the belief in Christianity. But after the crash, *faith* emerged as strong as ever, only craving and eager to make a fresh peace, a fresh compact with the reason.

Elsmere had heard Grey say long ago in one of the few moments of real intimacy he had enjoyed with him at Oxford, 'My interest in philosophy springs solely from the chance it offers me of knowing something more of God!' Driven by the same thirst he too threw

himself into the same quest, pushing his way laboriously through the philosophical borderlands of science, through the ethical speculation of the day, through the history of man's moral and religious past. And while on the one hand the intellect was able to contribute an ever stronger support to the faith which was in the man, on the other the sphere in him of a patient ignorance which abstains from all attempts at knowing what man cannot know, and substitutes trust for either knowledge or despair, was perpetually widening. 'I take my stand on conscience and the moral life!' was the upshot of it all. 'In them I find my God! As for all these various problems, ethical and scientific, which you press upon me, my pessimist friend, I, too, am bewildered; I, too, have no explanation to offer. But I trust and wait. In spite of them — beyond them — I have abundantly enough for faith — for hope — for action!'

We may quote a passage or two from some letters of his written at this time to that young Armitstead who had taken his place at Murewell, and was still there till Mowbray Elsmere should appoint a new man. Armitstead had been a college friend of Elsmere's. He was a High Churchman of a singularly gentle and delicate type, and the manner in which he had received Elsmere's story on the day of his arrival at Murewell had permanently endeared him to the teller of it. At the same time the defection from Christianity of a man who at Oxford had been to him the object of much hero-worship, and, since Oxford, an example of pastoral efficiency, had painfully affected young Armitstead, and he began a correspondence with Robert

which was in many ways a relief to both. In Switzerland and Italy, when his wife's gentle inexorable silence became too oppressive to him, Robert would pour himself out in letters to Armitstead, and the correspondence did not altogether cease with his return to London. To the squire during the same period Elsmere also wrote frequently, but rarely or never on religious matters.

On one occasion Armitstead had been pressing the favourite Christian dilemma — Christianity or nothing. Inside Christianity, light and certainty; outside it, chaos. 'If it were not for the Gospels and the Church I should be a Positivist to-morrow. Your Theism is a mere arbitrary hypothesis, at the mercy of any rival philosophical theory. How, regarding our position as precarious, you should come to regard your own as stable, is to me incomprehensible!'

'What I conceive to be the vital difference between Theism and Christianity,' wrote Elsmere in reply, 'is that as an explanation of things *Theism can never be disproved.* At the worst it must always remain in the position of an alternative hypothesis, which the hostile man of science cannot destroy, though he is under no obligation to adopt it. Broadly speaking, it is not the facts which are in dispute, but the inference to be drawn from them.

'Now, considering the enormous complication of the facts, the Theistic inference will, to put it at the lowest, always have its place, always command respect. The man of science may not adopt it, but by no advance of science that I, at any rate, can foresee, can it be driven out of the field.

'Christianity is in a totally different position. Its grounds are not philosophical but literary and historical. It rests not upon all fact, but upon a special group of facts. It is, and will always remain, a great literary and historical problem, a *question of documents and testimony*. Hence, the Christian explanation is vulnerable in a way in which the Theistic explanation can never be vulnerable. The contention, at any rate, of persons in my position is: That to the man who has had the special training required, and in whom this training has not been neutralised by any overwhelming bias of temperament, it can be as clearly demonstrated that the miraculous Christian story rests on a tissue of mistake, as it can be demonstrated that the Isidorian Decretals were a forgery, or the correspondence of Paul and Seneca a pious fraud, or that the mediæval belief in witchcraft was the product of physical ignorance and superstition.'

'You say,' he wrote again, in another connexion, to Armitstead from Milan, 'you say you think my later letters have been far too aggressive and positive. I, too, am astonished at myself. I do not know my own mood, it is so clear, so sharp, so combative. Is it the spectacle of Italy, I wonder — of a country practically without religion — the spectacle in fact of Latin Europe as a whole, and the practical Atheism in which it is ingulfed? My dear friend, the problem of the world at this moment is — *how to find a religion?* — some great conception which shall be once more capable, as the old were capable, of welding societies, and keeping man's brutish elements in check. Surely Christianity of the traditional sort is failing everywhere — less obviously

with us, and in Teutonic Europe generally, but egregiously, notoriously, in all the Catholic countries. We talk complacently of the decline of Buddhism. But what have we to say of the decline of Christianity? And yet this last is infinitely more striking and more tragic, inasmuch as it affects a more important section of mankind. I, at any rate, am not one of those who would seek to minimise the results of this decline for human life, nor can I bring myself to believe that Positivism or "evolutional morality" will ever satisfy the race.

'In the period of social struggle which undeniably lies before us, both in the old and the new world, are we then to witness a war of classes, unsoftened by the ideal hopes, the ideal law, of faith? It looks like it. What does the artisan class, what does the town democracy throughout Europe, care any longer for Christian checks or Christian sanctions as they have been taught to understand them? Superstition, in certain parts of rural Europe, there is in plenty, but wherever you get intelligence and therefore movement, you get at once either indifference to, or a passionate break with, Christianity. And consider what it means, what it will mean, this Atheism of the great democracies which are to be our masters! The world has never seen anything like it; such spiritual anarchy and poverty combined with such material power and resource. Every society — Christian and non-Christian — has always till now had its ideal, of greater or less ethical value, its appeal to something beyond man. Has Christianity brought us to this: that the Christian nations are to be the first in the world's history to try

the experiment of a life without faith — that life which you and I, at any rate, are agreed in thinking a life worthy only of the brute?

'Oh forgive me! These things must hurt you — they would have hurt me in old days — but they burn within me, and you bid me speak out. What if it be God Himself who is driving His painful lesson home to me, to you, to the world? What does it mean, this gradual growth of what we call infidelity, of criticism and science on the one hand, this gradual death of the old traditions on the other? *Sin*, you answer, *the enmity of the human mind against God, the momentary triumph of Satan.* And so you acquiesce, heavy-hearted, in God's present defeat, looking for vengeance and requital hereafter. Well, I am not so ready to believe in man's capacity to rebel against his Maker! Where you see ruin and sin, I see the urgent process of Divine education, God's steady ineluctable command "to put away childish things," the pressure of His spirit on ours towards new ways of worship and new forms of love!'

And after a while, it was with these 'new ways of worship and new forms of love' that the mind began to be perpetually occupied. The break with the old things was no sooner complete than the eager soul, incapable then, as always, of resting in negation or opposition, pressed passionately forward to a new synthesis, not only speculative, but practical. Before it rose perpetually the haunting vision of another palace of faith — another church or company of the faithful, which was to become the shelter of human aspir-

ation amid the desolation and anarchy caused by the crashing of the old! How many men and women must have gone through the same strait as itself — how many must be watching with it through the darkness for the rising of a new City of God!

One afternoon, close upon Christmas, he found himself in Parliament Square, on his way towards Westminster Bridge and the Embankment. The beauty of a sunset sky behind the Abbey arrested him, and he stood leaning over the railings beside the Peel statue to look.

The day before he had passed the same spot with a German friend. His companion — a man of influence and mark in his own country, who had been brought up, however, in England, and knew it well — had stopped before the Abbey and had said to him with emphasis: 'I never find myself in this particular spot of London without a sense of emotion and reverence. Other people feel that in treading the Forum of Rome they are at the centre of human things. I am more thrilled by Westminster than Rome; your venerable Abbey is to me the symbol of a nationality to which the modern world owes obligations it can never repay. You are rooted deep in the past; you have also a future of infinite expansiveness stretching before you. Among European nations at this moment you alone have freedom in the true sense, you alone have religion. I would give a year of life to know what you will have made of your freedom and your religion two hundred years hence!'

As Robert recalled the words, the Abbey lay before him, wrapped in the bluish haze of the winter afternoon.

Only the towers rose out of the mist, grey and black against the red bands of cloud. A pair of pigeons circled round them, as careless and free in flight as though they were alone with the towers and the sunset. Below, the streets were full of people; the omnibuses rolled to and fro; the lamps were just lit; lines of straggling figures, dark in the half-light, were crossing the street here and there. And to all the human rush and swirl below, the quiet of the Abbey and the infinite red distances of sky gave a peculiar pathos and significance.

Robert filled his eye and sense, and then walked quickly away towards the Embankment. Carrying the poetry and grandeur of England's past with him, he turned his face eastward to the great new-made London on the other side of St. Paul's, the London of the democracy, of the nineteenth century, and of the future. He was wrestling with himself, a prey to one of those critical moments of life, when circumstance seems once more to restore to us the power of choice, of distributing a Yes or a No among the great solicitations which meet the human spirit on its path from silence to silence. The thought of his friend's reverence, and of his own personal debt towards the country to whose long travail of centuries he owed all his own joys and faculties, was hot within him.

'Here and here did England help me — how can I help England, — say!'

Ah! that vast chaotic London south and east of the great church! He already knew something of it. A Liberal clergyman there, settled in the very blackest, busiest heart of it, had already made him welcome on

Mr. Grey's introduction. He had gone with this good man on several occasions through some little fraction of that teeming world, now so hidden and peaceful between the murky river mists and the cleaner light-filled greys of the sky. He had heard much, and pondered a good deal, the quick mind caught at once by the differences, some tragic, some merely curious and stimulating, between the monotonous life of his own rural folk, and the mad rush, the voracious hurry, the bewildering appearances and disappearances, the sudden ingulfments, of working London.

Moreover, he had spent a Sunday or two wandering among the East End churches. There, rather than among the streets and courts outside, as it had seemed to him, lay the tragedy of the city. Such emptiness, such desertion, such a hopeless breach between the great craving need outside and the boon offered it within! Here and there, indeed, a patch of bright-coloured success, as it claimed to be, where the primitive tendency of man towards the organised excitement of religious ritual, visible in all nations and civilisations, had been appealed to with more energy and more results than usual. But in general, blank failure, or rather obvious want of success — as the devoted men now beating the void there were themselves the first to admit, with pain and patient submission to the inscrutable Will of God.

But is it not time we assured ourselves, he was always asking, whether God is still in truth behind the offer man is perpetually making to his brother man on His behalf? He was behind it once, and it had efficacy, had power. But now — what if all these processes of

so-called destruction and decay were but the mere workings of that Divine plastic force which is for ever moulding human society? What if these beautiful venerable things which had fallen from him, as from thousands of his fellows, represented, in the present stage of the world's history, not the props, but the hindrances, of man?

And if all these large things were true, as he believed, what should be the individual's part in this transition England? Surely, at the least, a part of plain sincerity of act and speech — a correspondence as perfect as could be reached between the inner faith and the outer word and deed. So much, at the least, was clearly required of him!

'Do not imagine,' he said to himself, as though with a fierce dread of possible self-delusion, 'that it is in you to play any great, any commanding part. Shun the thought of it, if it *were* possible! But let me do what is given me to do! Here, in this human wilderness, may I spend whatever of time or energy or faculty may be mine, in the faithful attempt to help forward the new House of Faith that is to be, though my utmost efforts should but succeed in laying some obscure stone in still unseen foundations! Let me try and hand on to some other human soul, or souls, before I die, the truth which has freed, and which is now sustaining, my own heart. Can any man do more? Is not every man who feels any certainty in him whatever bound to do as much? What matter if the wise folk scoff, if even at times, and in a certain sense, one seems to one's self ridiculous — absurdly lonely and powerless! All great changes are preceded by numbers of sporadic, and as

the bystander thinks, impotent efforts. But while the individual effort sinks, drowned perhaps in mockery, the general movement quickens, gathers force we know not how, and —

> 'While the tired wave vainly breaking,
> Seems here no painful inch to gain,
> Far back through creeks and inlets making,
> Comes silent, flooding in the main!'

Darkness sank over the river; all the grey and purple distance with its dim edge of spires and domes against the sky, all the vague intervening blacknesses of street, or bridge, or railway station were starred and patterned with lights. The vastness, the beauty of the city filled him with a sense of mysterious attraction, and as he walked on with his face uplifted to it, it was as though he took his life in his hand and flung it afresh into the human gulf.

'What does it matter if one's work be raw and uncomely! All that lies outside the great organised traditions of an age must always look so. Let me bear my witness bravely, not spending life in speech, but not undervaluing speech — above all, not being ashamed or afraid of it, because other wise people may prefer a policy of silence. A man has but the one puny life, the one tiny spark of faith. Better be venturesome with both for God's sake, than over-cautious, over-thrifty. And — to his own Master he standeth or falleth!'

Plans of work of all kinds, literary and practical, thoughts of preaching in some bare hidden room to men and women orphaned and stranded like himself, began to crowd upon him. The old clerical instinct in

him winced at some of them. Robert had nothing of the sectary about him by nature; he was always too deeply and easily affected by the great historic existences about him. But when the Oxford man or the ex-official of one of the most venerable and decorous of societies protested, the believer, or, if you will, the enthusiast, put the protest by.

And so the dream gathered substance and stayed with him, till at last he found himself at his own door. As he closed it behind him, Catherine came out into the pretty old hall from the dining-room.

'Robert, have you walked all the way?'

'Yes, I came along the Embankment. Such a beautiful evening!'

He slipped his arm inside hers, and they mounted the stairs together. She glanced at him wistfully. She was perfectly aware that these months were to him months of incessant travail of spirit, and she caught at this moment the old strenuous look of eye and brow she knew so well. A year ago, and every thought of his mind had been open to her — and now — she herself had shut them out — but her heart sank within her.

She turned and kissed him. He bent his head fondly over her. But inwardly all the ardour of his mood collapsed at the touch of her. For the protests of a world in arms can be withstood with joy, but the protest that steals into your heart, that takes love's garb and uses love's ways — *there* is the difficulty!

## CHAPTER XXXIII

But Robert was some time in finding his opening, in realising any fraction of his dream. At first he tried work under the Broad Church vicar to whom Grey had introduced him. He undertook some rent-collecting, and some evening lectures on elementary science to boys and men. But after a while he began to feel his position false and unsatisfactory. In truth, his opinions were in the main identical with those of the vicar under whom he was acting. But Mr. Vernon was a Broad Churchman, belonged to the Church Reform movement, and thought it absolutely necessary to 'keep things going,' and by a policy of prudent silence and gradual expansion from within, to save the great 'plant' of the Establishment from falling wholesale into the hands of the High Churchmen. In consequence he was involved, as Robert held, in endless contradictions and practical falsities of speech and action. His large church was attended by a handful of some fifty to a hundred persons. Vernon could not preach what he did believe, and would not preach, more than was absolutely necessary, what he did not believe. He was hard-working and kind-hearted, but the perpetual divorce between thought and action, which his position made inevitable, was constantly blunting and weakening all he did. His whole life, indeed, was one long waste of power, simply for lack of an elementary frankness.

But if these became Robert's views as to Vernon, Vernon's feeling towards Elsmere after six weeks' acquaintance was not less decided. He was constitutionally timid, and he probably divined in his new helper a man of no ordinary calibre, whose influence might very well turn out some day to be of the 'incalculably diffusive' kind. He grew uncomfortable, begged Elsmere to beware of any 'direct religious teaching,' talked in warm praise of a 'policy of omissions,' and in equally warm denunciation of 'anything like a policy of attack.' In short, it became plain that two men so much alike, and yet so different, could not long co-operate.

However, just as the fact was being brought home to Elsmere, a friendly chance intervened.

Hugh Flaxman, the Leyburns' new acquaintance and Lady Helen's brother, had been drawn to Elsmere at first sight; and a meeting or two, now at Lady Charlotte's, now at the Leyburns', had led both men far on the way to a friendship. Of Hugh Flaxman himself more hereafter. At present all that need be recorded is that it was at Mr. Flaxman's house, overlooking St. James's Park, Robert first met a man who was to give him the opening for which he was looking.

Mr. Flaxman was fond of breakfast-parties *à la* Rogers, and on the first occasion when Robert could be induced to attend one of these functions, he saw opposite to him what he supposed to be a lad of twenty, a young slip of a fellow, whose sallies of fun and invincible good humour attracted him greatly.

Sparkling brown eyes, full lips rich in humour and pugnacity, 'lockës crull as they were layde in presse,'

the same look of 'wonderly' activity too, in spite of his short stature and dainty make, as Chaucer lends his squire — the type was so fresh and pleasing that Robert was more and more held by it, especially when he discovered to his bewilderment that the supposed stripling must be from his talk a man quite as old as himself, an official besides, filling what was clearly some important place in the world. He took his full share in the politics and literature started at the table, and presently, when conversation fell on the proposed municipality for London, said things to which the whole party listened. Robert's curiosity was aroused, and after breakfast he questioned his host and was promptly introduced to 'Mr. Murray Edwardes.'

Whereupon it turned out that this baby-faced sage was filling a post, in the work of which perhaps few people in London could have taken so much interest as Robert Elsmere.

Fifty years before, a wealthy merchant who had been one of the chief pillars of London Unitarianism had made his will and died. His great warehouses lay in one of the eastern riverside districts of the city, and in his will he endeavoured to do something according to his lights for the place in which he had amassed his money. He left a fairly large bequest wherewith to build and endow a Unitarian chapel and found certain Unitarian charities, in the heart of what was even then one of the densest and most poverty-stricken of London parishes. For a long time, however, chapel and charities seemed likely to rank as one of the idle freaks of religious wealth and nothing more. Unitarianism of the old sort is perhaps the most illogical creed that

exists, and certainly it has never been the creed of the poor. In old days it required the presence of a certain arid stratum of the middle classes to live and thrive at all. This stratum was not to be found in R——, which rejoiced instead in the most squalid types of poverty and crime, types wherewith the mild shrivelled Unitarian minister had about as much power of grappling as a Poet Laureate with a Trafalgar Square Socialist.

Soon after the erection of the chapel, there arose that shaking of the dry bones of religious England which we call the Tractarian Movement. For many years the new force left R—— quite undisturbed. The parish church droned away, the Unitarian minister preached decorously to empty benches, knowing nothing of the agitations outside. At last, however, towards the end of the old minister's life, a powerful church of the new type, staffed by friends and pupils of Pusey, rose in the centre of R——, and the little Unitarian chapel was for a time more snuffed out than ever, a fate which this time it shared dismally with the parish church. As generally happened, however, in those days, the proceedings at this new and splendid St. Wilfrid's were not long in stirring up the Protestantism of the British rough, — the said Protestantism being always one of the finest excuses for brickbats of which the modern cockney is master. The parish lapsed into a state of private war — hectic clergy heading exasperated processions or intoning defiant Litanies on the one side, — mobs, rotten eggs, dead cats, and blatant Protestant orators on the other.

The war went on practically for years, and while it was still raging the minister of the Unitarian chapel

died, and the authorities concerned chose in his place a young fellow, the son of a Bristol minister, a Cambridge man besides, as chance would have it, of brilliant attainments, and unusually commended from many quarters, even including some Church ones of the Liberal kind. This curly-haired youth, as he was then in reality, and as to his own quaint vexation he went on seeming to be up to quite middle age, had the wit to perceive at the moment of his entry on the troubled scene that behind all the mere brutal opposition to the new church, and in contrast with the sheer indifference of three-fourths of the district, there was a small party consisting of an aristocracy of the artisans, whose protest against the Puseyite doings was of a much quieter sterner sort, and amongst whom the uproar had mainly roused a certain crude power of thinking. He threw himself upon this element, which he rather divined than discovered, and it responded. He preached a simple creed, drove it home by pure and generous living; he lectured, taught, brought down workers from the West End, and before he had been five years in harness had not only made himself a power in R——, but was beginning to be heard of and watched with no small interest by many outsiders.

This was the man on whom Robert had now stumbled. Before they had talked twenty minutes each was fascinated by the other. They said good-bye to their host, and wandered out together into St. James's Park, where the trees were white with frost and an orange sun was struggling through the fog. Here Murray Edwardes poured out the whole story of his

ministry to attentive ears. Robert listened eagerly. Unitarianism was not a familiar subject of thought to him. He had never dreamt of joining the Unitarians, and was indeed long ago convinced that in the beliefs of a Channing no one once fairly started on the critical road could rationally stop. That common thinness and aridity, too, of the Unitarian temper had weighed with him. But here, in the person of Murray Edwardes, it was as though he saw something old and threadbare revivified. The young man's creed, as he presented it, had grace, persuasiveness, even unction; and there was something in his tone of mind which was like a fresh wind blowing over the fevered places of the other's heart.

They talked long and earnestly, Edwardes describing his own work, and the changes creeping over the modern Unitarian body, Elsmere saying little, asking much.

At last the young man looked at Elsmere with eyes of bright decision.

'You cannot work with the Church!' he said — 'it is impossible. You will only wear yourself out in efforts to restrain what you could do infinitely more good, as things stand now, by pouring out. Come to us! — I will put you in the way. You shall be hampered by no pledges of any sort. Come and take the direction of some of my workers. We have all got our hands more than full. Your knowledge, your experience, would be invaluable. There is no other opening like it in England just now for men of your way of thinking and mine. Come! Who knows what we may be putting our hands to — what fruit may grow from the smallest seed?'

The two men stopped beside the lightly frozen water. Robert gathered that in this soul, too, there had risen the same large intoxicating dream of a reorganised Christendom, a new wide-spreading shelter of faith for discouraged browbeaten man, as in his own. 'I will!' he said briefly, after a pause, his own look kindling — 'it is the opening I have been pining for. I will give you all I can, and bless you for the chance.'

That evening Robert got home late after a busy day full of various engagements. Mary, after some waiting up for 'Fader,' had just been carried protesting, red lips pouting, and fat legs kicking, off to bed. Catherine was straightening the room, which had been thrown into confusion by the child's romps.

It was with an effort — for he knew it would be a shock to her — that he began to talk to her about the breakfast-party at Mr. Flaxman's and his talk with Murray Edwardes. But he had made it a rule with himself to tell her everything that he was doing or meant to do. She would not let him tell her what he was thinking. But as much openness as there could be between them, there should be.

Catherine listened — still moving about the while — the thin beautiful lips becoming more and more compressed. Yes, it was hard to her, very hard; the people among whom she had been brought up, her father especially, would have held out the hand of fellowship to any body of Christian people, but not to the Unitarian. No real barrier of feeling divided them from any orthodox Dissenter, but the gulf between them and the Unitarian had been dug very deep by various

forces — forces of thought originally, of strong habit and prejudice in the course of time.

'He is going to work with them now,' she thought bitterly; 'soon he will be one of them — perhaps a Unitarian minister himself.'

And for the life of her, as he told his tale, she could find nothing but embarrassed monosyllables, and still more embarrassed silences, wherewith to answer him. Till at last he too fell silent, feeling once more the sting of a now habitual discomfort.

Presently, however, Catherine came to sit down beside him. She laid her head against his knee, saying nothing, but gathering his hand closely in both her own.

Poor woman's heart! One moment in rebellion, the next a suppliant. He bent down quickly and kissed her.

'Would you like,' he said presently, after both had sat silent a while in the firelight, 'would you care to go to Madame de Netteville's to-night?'

'By all means,' said Catherine with a sort of eagerness. 'It *was* Friday she asked us for, was n't it? We will be quick over dinner, and I will go and dress.'

In that last ten minutes which Robert had spent with the squire in his bedroom, on the Monday afternoon, when they were to have walked, Mr. Wendover had drily recommended Elsmere to cultivate Madame de Netteville. He sat propped up in his chair, white, gaunt, and cynical, and this remark of his was almost the only reference he would allow to the Elsmere move.

'You had better go there,' he said huskily, 'it will

do you good. She gets the first-rate people and she makes them talk, which Lady Charlotte can't. Too many fools at Lady Charlotte's; she waters the wine too much.'

And he had persisted with the subject — using it, as Elsmere thought, as a means of warding off other conversation. He would not ask Elsmere's plans, and he would not allow a word about himself.

There had been a heart attack, old Meyrick thought, coupled with signs of nervous strain and excitement. It was the last ailment which evidently troubled the doctor most. But, behind the physical breakdown, there was to Robert's sense something else, a spiritual something, infinitely forlorn and piteous, which revealed itself wholly against the elder man's will, and filled the younger with a dumb helpless rush of sympathy. Since his departure Robert had made the keeping up of his correspondence with the squire a binding obligation, and he was to-night chiefly anxious to go to Madame de Netteville's that he might write an account of it to Murewell.

Still the squire's talk, and his own glimpse of her at Murewell, had made him curious to see more of the woman herself. The squire's ways of describing her were always half-approving, half-sarcastic. Robert sometimes imagined that he himself had been at one time more under her spell than he cared to confess. If so, it must have been when she was still in Paris, the young English widow of a man of old French family, rich, fascinating, distinguished, and the centre of a small *salon*, admission to which was one of the social blue ribbons of Paris.

Since the war of 1870 Madame de Netteville had fixed her headquarters in London, and it was to her house in Hans Place that the squire wrote to her about the Elsmeres. She owed Roger Wendover debts of various kinds, and she had an encouraging memory of the young clergyman on the terrace at Murewell. So she promptly left her cards, together with the intimation that she was at home always on Friday evenings.

'I have never seen the wife,' she meditated, as her delicate jewelled hand drew up the window of the brougham in front of the Elsmeres' lodgings. 'But if she is the ordinary country clergyman's spouse, the squire of course will have given the young man a hint.'

But whether from oblivion, or from some instinct of grim humour towards Catherine, whom he had always vaguely disliked, the squire said not one word about his wife to Robert in the course of their talk of Madame de Netteville.

Catherine took pains with her dress, sorely wishing to do Robert credit. She put on one of the gowns she had taken to Murewell when she married. It was black, simply made, and had been a favourite with both of them in the old surroundings.

So they drove off to Madame de Netteville's. Catherine's heart was beating faster than usual as she mounted the twisting stairs of the luxurious little house. All these new social experiences were a trial to her. But she had the vaguest, most unsuspicious ideas of what she was to see in this particular house.

A long low room was thrown open to them. Unlike most English rooms, it was barely though richly

furnished. A Persian carpet, of a self-coloured greyish blue, threw the gilt French chairs and the various figures sitting upon them into delicate relief. The walls were painted white, and had a few French mirrors and girandoles upon them, half a dozen fine French portraits, too, here and there, let into the wall in oval frames. The subdued light came from the white sides of the room, and seemed to be there solely for social purposes. You could hardly have read or written in the room, but you could see a beautiful woman in a beautiful dress there, and you could talk there, either *tête-à-tête*, or to the assembled company, to perfection, so cunningly was it all devised.

When the Elsmeres entered, there were about a dozen people present — ten gentlemen and two ladies. One of the ladies, Madame de Netteville, was lying back in the corner of a velvet divan placed against the wall, a screen between her and a splendid fire that threw its blaze out into the room. The other, a slim woman with closely curled fair hair, and a neck abnormally long and white, sat near her, and the circle of men was talking indiscriminately to both.

As the footman announced Mr. and Mrs. Elsmere, there was a general stir of surprise. The men looked round; Madame de Netteville half-rose with a puzzled look. It was more than a month since she had dropped her invitation. Then a flash, not altogether of pleasure, passed over her face, and she said a few hasty words to the woman near her, advancing the moment afterwards to give her hand to Catherine.

'This is very kind of you, Mrs. Elsmere, to remember me so soon. I had imagined you were hardly

settled enough yet to give me the pleasure of seeing you.'

But the eyes fixed on Catherine, eyes which took in everything, were not cordial, for all their smile.

Catherine, looking up at her, was overpowered by her excessive manner, and by the woman's look of conscious sarcastic strength, struggling through all the outer softness of beauty and exquisite dress.

'Mr. Elsmere, you will find this room almost as hot, I am afraid, as that afternoon on which we met last. Let me introduce you to Count Wielandt — Mr. Elsmere. Mrs. Elsmere, will you come over here, beside Lady Aubrey Willert.'

Robert found himself bowing to a young diplomatist, who seemed to him to look at him very much as he himself might have scrutinised an inhabitant of New Guinea. Lady Aubrey made an imperceptible movement of the head as Catherine was presented to her, and Madame de Netteville, smiling and biting her lip a little, fell back into her seat.

There was a faint odour of smoke in the room. As Catherine sat down, a young exquisite a few yards from her threw the end of a cigarette into the fire with a little sharp decided gesture. Lady Aubrey also pushed away a cigarette-case which lay beside her hand.

Everybody there had the air more or less of an habitué of the house; and when the conversation began again, the Elsmeres found it very hard, in spite of certain perfunctory efforts on the part of Madame de Netteville, to take any share in it.

'Well, I believe the story about Desforêts is true,'

said the fair-haired young Apollo, who had thrown away his cigarette, lolling back in his chair.

Catherine started, the little scene with Rose and Langham in the English rectory garden flashing incongruously back upon her.

'If you get it from the *Ferret*, my dear Evershed,' said the ex-Tory minister, Lord Rupert, 'you may put it down as a safe lie. As for me, I believe she has a much shrewder eye to the main chance.'

'What do you mean?' said the other, raising astonished eyebrows.

'Well, it does n't *pay*, you know, to write yourself down a fiend — not quite.'

'What — you think it will affect her audiences? Well, that is a good joke!' and the young man laughed immoderately, joined by several of the other guests.

'I don't imagine it will make any difference to you, my good friend,' returned Lord Rupert imperturbably; 'but the British public have n't got your nerve. They *may* take it awkwardly — I don't say they will — when a woman who has turned her own young sister out of doors at night, in St. Petersburg, so that ultimately as a consequence the girl dies, comes to ask them to clap her touching impersonations of injured virtue.'

'What has one to do with an actress's private life, my dear Lord Rupert?' asked Madame de Netteville, her voice slipping with a smooth clearness into the conversation, her eyes darting light from under straight black brows.

'What indeed!' said the young man who had begun the conversation with a disagreeable enigmatical smile,

stretching out his hand for another cigarette, and drawing it back with a look under his drooped eyelids — a look of cold impertinent scrutiny — at Catherine Elsmere.

'Ah! well — I don't want to be obtrusively moral — Heaven forbid! But there is such a thing as destroying the illusion to such an extent that you injure your pocket. Desforêts is doing it — doing it actually in Paris too.'

There was a ripple of laughter.

'Paris and illusions — *O mon Dieu!*' groaned young Evershed, when he had done laughing, laying meditative hands on his knees and gazing into the fire.

'I tell you I have seen it,' said Lord Rupert, waxing combative, and slapping the leg he was nursing with emphasis. 'The last time I went to see Desforêts in Paris the theatre was crammed, and the house — theatrically speaking — *ice.* They received her in dead silence — they gave her not one single recall — and they only gave her a clap, that I can remember, at those two or three points in the play where clap they positively must or burst. They go to see her — but they loathe her — and they let her know it.'

'Bah!' said his opponent, 'it is only because they are tired of her. Her vagaries don't amuse them any longer — they know them by heart. And — by George! she has some pretty rivals too, now!' he added reflectively, — 'not to speak of the Bernhardt.'

'Well, the Parisians *can* be shocked,' said Count Wielandt in excellent English, bending forward so as to get a good view of his hostess. 'They are just

now especially shocked by the condition of English morals!'

The twinkle in his eye was irresistible. The men, understanding his reference to the avidity with which certain English aristocratic scandals had been lately seized upon by the French papers, laughed out — so did Lady Aubrey. Madame de Netteville contented herself with a smile.

'They profess to be shocked, too, by Renan's last book,' said the editor from the other side of the room.

'Dear me!' said Lady Aubrey, with meditative scorn, fanning herself lightly the while, her thin but extraordinarily graceful head and neck thrown out against the golden brocade of the cushion behind her.

'Oh! what so many of them feel in Renan's case, of course,' said Madame de Netteville, 'is that every book he writes now gives a fresh opening to the enemy to blaspheme. Your eminent freethinker can't afford just yet, in the present state of the world, to make himself socially ridiculous. The cause suffers.'

'Just my feeling,' said young Evershed calmly. 'Though I may n't care a rap about him personally, I prefer that a man on my own front bench should n't make a public ass of himself if he can help it — not for his sake, of course, but for mine!'

Robert looked at Catherine. She sat upright by the side of Lady Aubrey; her face, of which the beauty to-night seemed lost in rigidity, pale and stiff. With a contraction of heart he plunged himself into the conversation. On his road home that evening he had found an important foreign telegram posted up at the small literary club to which he had belonged since

Oxford days. He made a remark about it now to Count Wielandt; and the diplomatist, turning rather unwillingly to face his questioner, recognised that the remark was a shrewd one.

Presently the young man's frank intelligence had told. On his way to and from the Holy Land three years before Robert had seen something of the East, and it so happened that he remembered the name of Count Wielandt as one of the foreign secretaries of legation present at an official party given by the English Ambassador at Constantinople, which he and his mother had attended on their return journey, in virtue of a family connexion with the Ambassador. All that he could glean from memory he made quick use of now, urged at first by the remorseful wish to make this new world into which he had brought Catherine less difficult than he knew it must have been during the last quarter of an hour.

But after a while he found himself leading the talk of a section of the room, and getting excitement and pleasure out of the talk itself. Ever since that Eastern journey he had kept an eye on the subjects which had interested him then, reading in his rapid voracious way all that came across him at Murewell, especially in the squire's foreign newspapers and reviews, and storing it when read in a remarkable memory.

Catherine, after the failure of some conversational attempts between her and Madame de Netteville, fell to watching her husband with a start of strangeness and surprise. She had scarcely seen him at Oxford among his equals; and she had very rarely been present at his talks with the squire. In some ways, and

owing to the instinctive reserves set up between them for so long, her intellectual knowledge of him was very imperfect. His ease, his resource, among these men of the world, for whom — independent of all else — she felt a countrywoman's dislike, filled her with a kind of bewilderment.

'Are you new to London?' Lady Aubrey asked her presently, in that tone of absolute detachment from the person addressed which certain women manage to perfection. She, too, had been watching the husband, and the sight had impressed her with a momentary curiosity to know what the stiff, handsome, dowdily-dressed wife was made of.

'We have been two months here,' said Catherine, her large grey eyes taking in her companion's very bare shoulders, the costly fantastic dress, and the diamonds flashing against the white skin.

'In what part?'

'In Bedford Square.'

Lady Aubrey was silent. She had no ideas on the subject of Bedford Square at command.

'We are very central,' said Catherine, feeling desperately that she was doing Robert no credit at all, and anxious to talk if only something could be found to talk about.

'Oh yes, you are near the theatres,' said the other indifferently.

This was hardly an aspect of the matter which had yet occurred to Catherine. A flash of bitterness ran through her. Had they left their Murewell life to be 'near the theatres,' and kept at arm's length by supercilious great ladies?

'We are very far from the Park,' she answered with an effort. 'I wish we were n't, for my little girl's sake.'

'Oh, you have a little girl! How old?'

'Sixteen months.'

'Too young to be a nuisance yet. Mine are just old enough to be in everybody's way. Children are out of place in London. I always want to leave mine in the country, but my husband objects,' said Lady Aubrey coolly. There was a certain piquancy in saying frank things to this stiff Madonna-faced woman.

Madame de Netteville, meanwhile, was keeping up a conversation in an undertone with young Evershed, who had come to sit on a stool beside her, and was gazing up at her with eyes of which the expression was perfectly understood by several persons present. The handsome, dissipated, ill-conditioned youth had been her slave and shadow for the last two years. His devotion now no longer amused her, and she was endeavouring to get rid of it and him. But the process was a difficult one, and took both time and finesse.

She kept her eye, notwithstanding, on the newcomers whom the squire's introduction had brought to her that night. When the Elsmeres rose to go, she said good-bye to Catherine with an excessive politeness, under which her poor guest, conscious of her own *gaucherie* during the evening, felt the touch of satire she was perhaps meant to feel. But when Catherine was well ahead Madame de Netteville gave Robert one of her most brilliant smiles.

'Friday evening, Mr. Elsmere; always Fridays. You will remember?'

The naïveté of Robert's social view, and the mobility

of his temper, made him easily responsive. He had just enjoyed half an hour's brilliant talk with two or three of the keenest and most accomplished men in Europe. Catherine had slipped out of his sight meanwhile, and the impression of their *entrée* had been effaced. He made Madame de Netteville, therefore, a cordial smiling reply before his tall slender form disappeared after that of his wife.

'Agreeable — rather an acquisition!' said Madame de Netteville to Lady Aubrey, with a light motion of the head towards Robert's retreating figure. 'But the wife! Good heavens! I owe Roger Wendover a grudge. I think he might have made it plain to those good people that I don't want strange women at my Friday evenings.'

Lady Aubrey laughed. 'No doubt she is a genius, or a saint, in mufti. She might be handsome too if some one would dress her.'

Madame de Netteville shrugged her shoulders. 'Oh! life is not long enough to penetrate that kind of person,' she said.

Meanwhile the 'person' was driving homeward very sad and ill at ease. She was vexed that she had not done better, and yet she was wounded by Robert's enjoyment. The Puritan in her blood was all aflame. As she sat looking into the motley lamplit night, she could have 'testified' like any prophetess of old.

Robert meanwhile, his hand slipped into hers, was thinking of Wielandt's talk, and of some racy stories of Berlin celebrities told by a young *attaché* who had joined their group. His lips were lightly smiling, his brow serene.

But as he helped her down from the cab, and they stood in the hall together, he noticed the pale discomposure of her looks. Instantly the familiar dread and pain returned upon him.

'Did you like it, Catherine?' he asked her, with something like timidity, as they stood together by their bedroom fire.

She sank into a low chair and sat a moment staring at the blaze. He was startled by her look of suffering, and, kneeling, he put his arms tenderly round her.

'Oh, Robert, Robert!' she cried, falling on his neck.

'What is it?' he asked, kissing her hair.

'I seem all at sea,' she said in a choked voice, her face hidden, — 'the old landmarks swallowed up! I am always judging and condemning, — always protesting. What am I that I should judge? But how — how — can I help it?'

She drew herself away from him, once more looking into the fire with drawn brows.

'Darling, the world is full of difference. Men and women take life in different ways. Don't be so sure yours is the only right one.'

He spoke with a moved gentleness, taking her hand the while.

' "*This* is the way, walk ye in it!" ' she said presently with strong, almost stern emphasis. 'Oh, those women, and that talk! Hateful!'

He rose and looked down on her from the mantelpiece. Within him was a movement of impatience, repressed almost at once by the thought of that long night at Murewell, when he had vowed to himself to 'make amends'!

And if that memory had not intervened she would still have disarmed him wholly.

'Listen!' she said to him suddenly, her eyes kindling with a strange childish pleasure. 'Do you hear the wind, the west wind? Do you remember how it used to shake the house, how it used to come sweeping through the trees in the wood-path? It must be trying the study window now, blowing the vine against it.'

A yearning passion breathed through every feature. It seemed to him she saw nothing before her. Her longing soul was back in the old haunts, surrounded by the old loved forms and sounds. It went to his heart. He tried to soothe her with the tenderest words remorseful love could find. But the conflict of feeling — grief, rebellion, doubt, self-judgement — would not be soothed, and long after she had made him leave her and he had fallen asleep, she knelt on, a white and rigid figure in the dying firelight, the wind shaking the old house, the eternal murmur of London booming outside.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

MEANWHILE, as if to complete the circle of pain with which poor Catherine's life was compassed, it began to be plain to her that, in spite of the hard and mocking tone Rose generally adopted with regard to him, Edward Langham was constantly at the house in Lerwick Gardens, and that it was impossible he should be there so much unless in some way or other Rose encouraged it.

The idea of such a marriage — nay, of such a friendship — was naturally as repugnant as ever to her. It had been one of the bitterest moments of a bitter time when, at their first meeting after the crisis in her life, Langham, conscious of a sudden movement of pity for a woman he disliked, had pressed the hand she held out to him in a way which clearly showed her what was in his mind, and had then passed on to chat and smoke with Robert in the study, leaving her behind to realise the gulf that lay between the present and that visit of his to Murewell, when Robert and she had felt in unison towards him, his opinions, and his conduct to Rose, as towards everything else of importance in their life.

Now it seemed to her Robert must necessarily look at the matter differently, and she could not make up her mind to talk to him about it. In reality, his objections had never had the same basis as hers, and he would have given her as strong a support as ever, if she had asked for it. But she held her peace, and he,

absorbed in other things, took no notice. Besides, he knew Langham too well. He had never been able to take Catherine's alarms seriously.

An attentive onlooker, however, would have admitted that this time, at any rate, they had their justification. Why Langham was so much in the Leyburns' drawing-room during these winter months was a question that several people asked — himself not least. He had not only pretended to forget Rose Leyburn during the eighteen months which had passed since their first acquaintance at Murewell — he had for all practical purposes forgotten her. It is only a small proportion of men and women who are capable of passion on the great scale at all; and certainly, as we have tried to show, Langham was not among them. He had had a passing moment of excitement at Murewell, soon put down, and followed by a week of extremely pleasant sensations, which, like most of his pleasures, had ended in reaction and self-abhorrence. He had left Murewell remorseful, melancholy, and ill at ease, but conscious, certainly, of a great relief that he and Rose Leyburn were not likely to meet again for long.

Then his settlement in London had absorbed him, as all such matters absorb men who have become the slaves of their own solitary habits, and in the joy of his new freedom, and the fresh zest for learning it had aroused in him, the beautiful unmanageable child who had disturbed his peace at Murewell was not likely to be more, but less, remembered. When he stumbled across her unexpectedly in the National Gallery, his determining impulse had been merely one of flight.

However, as he had written to Robert towards the

beginning of his London residence, there was no doubt that his migration had made him for the time much more human, observant, and accessible. Oxford had become to him an oppression and a nightmare, and as soon as he had turned his back on it his mental lungs seemed once more to fill with air. He took his modest part in the life of the capital; happy in the obscurity afforded him by the crowd; rejoicing in the thought that his life and his affairs were once more his own, and the academical yoke had been slipped for ever.

It was in this mood of greater cheerfulness and energy that his fresh sight of Rose found him. For the moment, he was perhaps more susceptible than he ever could have been before to her young perfections, her beauty, her brilliancy, her provoking stimulating ways. Certainly, from that first afternoon onwards he became more and more restless to watch her, to be near her, to see what she made of herself and her gifts. In general, though it was certainly owing to her that he came so much, she took small notice of him. He regarded, or chose to regard, himself as a mere 'item' — something systematically overlooked and forgotten in the bustle of her days and nights. He saw that she thought badly of him, that the friendship he might have had was now proudly refused him, that their first week together had left a deep impression of resentment and hostility in her mind. And all the same he came; and she asked him! And sometimes, after an hour when she had been more difficult or more satirical than usual, ending notwithstanding with a little change of tone, a careless 'You will find us next Wednesday as usual; So-and-so is coming to play,' Langham would

walk home in a state of feeling he did not care to analyse, but which certainly quickened the pace of life a good deal. She would not let him try his luck at friendship again, but in the strangest slightest ways did she not make him suspect every now and then that he *was* in some sort important to her, that he sometimes preoccupied her against her will; that her will, indeed, sometimes escaped her, and failed to control her manner to him?

It was not only his relations to the beauty, however, his interest in her career, or his perpetual consciousness of Mrs. Elsmere's cold dislike and disapproval of his presence in her mother's drawing-room, that accounted for Langham's heightened mental temperature this winter. The existence and the proceedings of Mr. Hugh Flaxman had a very considerable share in it.

'Tell me about Mr. Langham,' said Mr. Flaxman once to Agnes Leyburn, in the early days of his acquaintance with the family; 'is he an old friend?'

'Of Robert's,' replied Agnes, her cheerful impenetrable look fixed upon the speaker. 'My sister met him once for a week in the country at the Elsmeres'. My mother and I have been only just introduced to him.'

Hugh Flaxman pondered the information a little.

'Does he strike you as — well — what shall we say? — unusual?'

His smile struck one out of her.

'Even Robert might admit that,' she said demurely.

'Is Elsmere so attached to him? I own I was provoked just now by his tone about Elsmere. I was remarking on the evident physical and mental strain

your brother-in-law had gone through, and he said with a nonchalance I cannot convey: "Yes, it is astonishing Elsmere should have ventured it. I confess I often wonder whether it was worth while." "Why?" said I, perhaps a little hotly. Well, he did n't know — would n't say. But I gathered that, according to him, Elsmere is still swathed in such an unconscionable amount of religion that the few rags and patches he has got rid of are hardly worth the discomfort of the change. It seemed to me the tone of the very cool spectator, rather than the friend. However — does your sister like him?'

'I don't know,' said Agnes, looking her questioner full in the face.

Hugh Flaxman's fair complexion flushed a little. He got up to go.

'He is one of the most extraordinarily handsome persons I ever saw,' he remarked as he buttoned up his coat. 'Don't you think so?'

'Yes,' said Agnes dubiously, 'if he did n't stoop, and if he did n't in general look half-asleep.'

Hugh Flaxman departed more puzzled than ever as to the reason for the constant attendance of this uncomfortable anti-social person at the Leyburns' house. Being himself a man of very subtle and fastidious tastes, he could imagine that so original a suitor, with such eyes, such an intellectual reputation so well sustained by scantiness of speech and the most picturesque capacity for silence, *might* have attractions for a romantic and wilful girl. But where were the signs of it? Rose rarely talked to him, and was always ready to make him the target of a sub-acid raillery. Agnes

was clearly indifferent to him, and Mrs. Leyburn equally clearly afraid of him. Mrs. Elsmere, too, seemed to dislike him, and yet there he was, week after week. Flaxman could not make it out.

Then he tried to explore the man himself. He started various topics with him — University reform, politics, music. In vain. In his most characteristic Oxford days Langham had never assumed a more wholesale ignorance of all subjects in heaven and earth, and never stuck more pertinaciously to the flattest forms of commonplace. Flaxman walked away at last boiling over. The man of parts masquerading as the fool is perhaps at least as exasperating as the fool playing at wisdom.

However, he was not the only person irritated. After one of these fragments of conversation Langham also walked rapidly home in a state of most irrational petulance, his hands thrust with energy into the pockets of his overcoat.

'No, my successful aristocrat, you shall not have everything your own way so easily with me or with *her!* You may break me, but you shall not play upon me. And as for her, I will see it out — I will see it out!'

And he stiffened himself as he walked, feeling life electric all about him, and a strange new force tingling in every vein.

Meanwhile, however, Mr. Flaxman was certainly having a good deal of his own way. Since the moment when his aunt, Lady Charlotte, had introduced him to Miss Leyburn — watching him the while with a half-smile which soon broadened into one of sly triumph — Hugh Flaxman had persuaded himself that country

houses are intolerable even in the shooting season, and that London is the only place of residence during the winter for the man who aspires to govern his life on principles of reason. Through his influence and that of his aunt, Rose and Agnes — Mrs. Leyburn never went out — were being carried into all the high life that London can supply in November and January. Wealthy, high-born, and popular, he was gradually devoting his advantages in the freest way to Rose's service. He was an excellent musical amateur, and he was always proud to play with her; he had a fine country house, and the little rooms on Campden Hill were almost always filled with flowers from his gardens; he had a famous musical library, and its treasures were lavished on the girl violinist; he had a singularly wide circle of friends, and with his whimsical energy he was soon inclined to make kindness to the two sisters the one test of a friend's good will.

He was clearly touched by Rose; and what was to prevent his making an impression on her? To her sex he had always been singularly attractive. Like his sister, he had all sorts of bright impulses and audacities flashing and darting about him. He had a certain *hauteur* with men, and could play the aristocrat when he pleased, for all his philosophical radicalism. But with women he was the most delightful mixture of deference and high spirits. He loved the grace of them, the daintiness of their dress, the softness of their voices. He would have done anything to please them, anything to save them pain. At twenty-five, when he was still 'Citizen Flaxman' to his college friends, and in the first fervours of a poetic defiance of prejudice

and convention, he had married a gamekeeper's pretty daughter. She had died with her child — died, almost, poor thing! of happiness and excitement — of the over-greatness of Heaven's boon to her. Flaxman had adored her, and death had tenderly embalmed a sentiment to which life might possibly have been less kind. Since then he had lived in music, letters, and society, refusing out of a certain fastidiousness to enter politics, but welcomed and considered, wherever he went, tall, good-looking, distinguished, one of the most agreeable and courted of men, and perhaps the richest *parti* in London.

Still, in spite of it all, Langham held his ground — Langham would see it out! And indeed Flaxman's footing with the beauty was by no means clear — least of all to himself. She evidently liked him, but she bantered him a good deal; she would not be the least subdued or dazzled by his birth and wealth, or by those of his friends; and if she allowed him to provide her with pleasures, she would hardly ever take his advice, or knowingly consult his tastes.

Meanwhile she tormented them both a good deal by the artistic acquaintance she gathered about her. Mrs. Pierson's world, as we have said, contained a good many dubious odds and ends, and she had handed them all over to Rose. The Leyburns' growing intimacy with Mr. Flaxman and his circle, and through them with the finer types of the artistic life, would naturally and by degrees have carried them away somewhat from this earlier circle if Rose would have allowed it. But she clung persistently to its most unpromising specimens, partly out of a natural generosity

of feeling, but partly also for the sake of that opposition her soul loved, her poor prickly soul, full under all her gaiety and indifference of the most desperate doubt and soreness, — opposition to Catherine, opposition to Mr. Flaxman, but, above all, opposition to Langham.

Flaxman could often avenge himself on her — or rather on the more obnoxious members of her following — by dint of a faculty for light and stinging repartee which would send her, flushed and biting her lip, to have her laugh out in private. But Langham for a long time was defenceless. Many of her friends in his opinion were simply pathological curiosities — their vanity was so frenzied, their sensibilities so morbidly developed. He felt a doctor's interest in them coupled with more than a doctor's scepticism as to all they had to say about themselves. But Rose would invite them, would assume a *quasi*-intimacy with them; and Langham as well as everybody else had to put up with it.

Even the trodden worm, however — And there came a time when the concentration of a good many different lines of feeling in Langham's mind betrayed itself at last in a sharp and sudden openness. It began to seem to him that she was specially bent often on tormenting *him* by these caprices of hers, and he vowed to himself finally, with an outburst of irritation due in reality to a hundred causes, that he would assert himself, that he would make an effort at any rate to save her from her own follies.

One afternoon, at a crowded musical party, to which he had come much against his will, and only in obedience to a compulsion he dared not analyse, she asked

him in passing if he would kindly find Mr. MacFadden, a bass singer, whose name stood next on the programme, and who was not to be seen in the drawing-room.

Langham searched the dining-room and the hall, and at last found Mr. MacFadden — a fair, flabby, unwholesome youth — in the little study or cloak-room, in a state of collapse, flanked by whiskey-and-water, and attended by two frightened maids, who handed over their charge to Langham and fled.

Then it appeared that the great man had been offended by a change in the programme, which hurt his vanity, had withdrawn from the drawing-room on the brink of hysterics, had called for spirits, which had been provided for him with great difficulty by Mrs. Leyburn's maids, and was there drinking himself into a state of rage and rampant dignity which would soon have shown itself in a melodramatic return to the drawing-room, and a public refusal to sing at all in a house where art had been outraged in his person.

Some of the old disciplinary instincts of the Oxford tutor awoke in Langham at the sight of the creature, and, with a prompt sternness which amazed himself, and nearly set MacFadden whimpering, he got rid of the man, shut the hall-door on him, and went back to the drawing-room.

'Well?' said Rose in anxiety, coming up to him.

'I have sent him away,' he said briefly, an eye of unusual quickness and brightness looking down upon her; 'he was in no condition to sing. He chose to be offended, apparently, because he was put out of his turn, and has been giving the servants trouble.'

Rose flushed deeply, and drew herself up with a look half trouble, half defiance, at Langham.

'I trust you will not ask him again,' he said, with the same decision. 'And if I might say so there are one or two people still here whom I should like to see you exclude at the same time.'

They had withdrawn into the bow-window out of earshot of the rest of the room. Langham's look turned significantly towards a group near the piano. It contained one or two men whom he regarded as belonging to a low type; men who, if it suited their purpose, would be quite ready to tell or invent malicious stories of the girl they were now flattering, and whose standards and instincts represented a coarser world than Rose in reality knew anything about.

Her eyes followed his.

'I know,' she said petulantly, 'that you dislike artists. They are not your world. They are mine.'

'I dislike artists? What nonsense, too! To me personally these men's ways don't matter in the least. They go their road and I mine. But I deeply resent any danger of discomfort and annoyance to you!'

He still stood frowning, a glow of indignant energy showing itself in his attitude, his glance. She could not know that he was at that moment vividly realising the drunken scene that might have taken place in her presence if he had not succeeded in getting that man safely out of the house. But she felt that he was angry, and mostly angry with her, and there was something so piquant and unexpected in his anger!

'I am afraid,' she said, with a queer sudden submissiveness, 'you have been going through something

very disagreeable. I am very sorry. Is it my fault?' she added, with a whimsical flash of eye, half fun, half serious.

He could hardly believe his ears.

'Yes, it is your fault, I think!' he answered her, amazed at his own boldness. 'Not that *I* was annoyed — Heavens! what does that matter? — but that you and your mother and sister were very near an unpleasant scene. You will not take advice, Miss Leyburn, — you will take your own way in spite of what any one else can say or hint to you, and some day you will expose yourself to annoyance when there is no one near to protect you!'

'Well, if so, it won't be for want of a mentor,' she said, dropping him a mock curtsey. But her lip trembled under its smile, and her tone had not lost its gentleness.

At this moment Mr. Flaxman, who had gradually established himself as the joint leader of these musical afternoons, came forward to summon Rose to a quartette. He looked from one to the other, a little surprise penetrating through his suavity of manner.

'Am I interrupting you?'

'Not at all,' said Rose; then, turning back to Langham, she said in a hurried whisper: 'Don't say anything about the wretched man; it would make mamma nervous. He shan't come here again.'

Mr. Flaxman waited till the whisper was over, and then led her off, with a change of manner which she immediately perceived, and which lasted for the rest of the evening.

Langham went home, and sat brooding over the

fire. Her voice had not been so kind, her look so womanly, for months. Had she been reading 'Shirley,' and would she have liked him to play Louis Moore? He went into a fit of silent convulsive laughter as the idea occurred to him.

Some secret instinct made him keep away from her for a time. At last, one Friday afternoon, as he emerged from the Museum, where he had been collating the MSS. of some obscure Alexandrian, the old craving returned with added strength, and he turned involuntarily westward.

An acquaintance of his, recently made in the course of work at the Museum, a young Russian professor, ran after him, and walked with him. Presently they passed a poster on the wall, which contained in enormous letters the announcement of Madame Desforêts's approaching visit to London, a list of plays, and the dates of performances.

The young Russian suddenly stopped and stood pointing at the advertisement, with shaking derisive finger, his eyes aflame, the whole man quivering with what looked like antagonism and hate.

Then he broke into a fierce flood of French. Langham listened till they had passed Piccadilly, passed the Park, and till the young savant turned southwards towards his Brompton lodgings.

Then Langham slowly climbed Campden Hill, meditating. His thoughts were an odd mixture of the things he had just heard, and of a scene at Murewell long ago when a girl had denounced him for 'calumny.'

At the door of Lerwick Gardens he was informed that Mrs. Leyburn was upstairs with an attack of bron-

chitis. But the servant thought the young ladies were at home. Would he come in? He stood irresolute a moment, then went in on a pretext of 'inquiry.'

The maid threw open the drawing-room door, and there was Rose sitting well into the fire — for it was a raw February afternoon — with a book.

She received him with all her old hard brightness. He was, indeed, instantly sorry that he had made his way in. Tyrant! was she displeased because he had slipped his chain for rather longer than usual?

However, he sat down, delivered his book, and they talked first about her mother's illness. They had been anxious, she said, but the doctor, who had just taken his departure, had now completely reassured them.

'Then you will be able probably after all to put in an appearance at Lady Charlotte's this evening?' he asked her.

The omnivorous Lady Charlotte of course had made acquaintance with him in the Leyburns' drawing-room, as she did with everybody who crossed her path, and three days before he had received a card from her for this evening.

'Oh yes! But I have had to miss a rehearsal this afternoon. That concert at Searle House is becoming a great nuisance.'

'It will be a brilliant affair, I suppose. Princes on one side of you — and Albani on the other. I see they have given you the most conspicuous part as violinist.'

'Yes,' she said with a little satirical tightening of the lip. 'Yes — I suppose I ought to be much flattered.'

'Of course,' he said, smiling, but embarrassed. 'To many people you must be at this moment one of the

most enviable persons in the world. A delightful art — and every opportunity to make it tell!'

There was a pause. She looked into the fire.

'I don't know whether it is a delightful art,' she said presently, stifling a little yawn. 'I believe I am getting very tired of London. Sometimes I think I should n't be very sorry to find myself suddenly spirited back to Burwood!'

Langham gave vent to some incredulous interjection. He had apparently surprised her in a fit of ennui which was rare with her.

'Oh no, not yet!' she said suddenly, with a return of animation. 'Madame Desforêts comes next week, and I am to see her.' She drew herself up and turned a beaming face upon him. Was there a shaft of mischief in her eye? He could not tell. The firelight was perplexing.

'You are to see her?' he said slowly. 'Is she coming here?'

'I hope so. Mrs. Pierson is to bring her. I want mamma to have the amusement of seeing her. My artistic friends are a kind of tonic to her — they excite her so much. She regards them as a sort of show — much as you do, in fact, only in a more charitable fashion.'

But he took no notice of what she was saying.

'Madame Desforêts is coming here?' he sharply repeated, bending forward, a curious accent in his tone.

'Yes!' she replied, with apparent surprise. Then with a careless smile: 'Oh, I remember when we were at Murewell, you were exercised that we should know her. Well, Mr. Langham, I told you then that you

were only echoing unworthy gossip. I am in the same mind still. I have seen her, and you have n't. To me she is the greatest actress in the world, and an ill-used woman to boot!'

Her tone had warmed with every sentence. It struck him that she had wilfully brought up the topic — that it gave her pleasure to quarrel with him.

He put down his hat deliberately, got up, and stood with his back to the fire. She looked up at him curiously. But the dark regular face was almost hidden from her.

'It is strange,' he said slowly, 'very strange — that you should have told me this at this moment! Miss Leyburn, a great deal of the truth about Madame Desforêts I could neither tell, nor could you hear. There are charges against her proved in open court, again and again, which I could not even mention in your presence. But one thing I can speak of. Do you know the story of the sister at St. Petersburg?'

'I know no stories against Madame Desforêts,' said Rose loftily, her quickened breath responding to the energy of his tone. 'I have always chosen not to know them.'

'The newspapers were full of this particular story just before Christmas. I should have thought it must have reached you.'

'I did not see it,' she replied stiffly; 'and I cannot see what good purpose is to be served by your repeating it to me, Mr. Langham.'

Langham could have smiled at her petulance, if he had not for once been determined and in earnest.

'You will let me tell it, I hope?' he said quietly.

'I will tell it so that it shall not offend your ears. As it happens, I myself thought it incredible at the time. But, by an odd coincidence, it has just this afternoon been repeated to me by a man who was an eyewitness of part of it.'

Rose was silent. Her attitude was hauteur itself, but she made no further active opposition.

'Three months ago,' he began, speaking with some difficulty, but still with a suppressed force of feeling which amazed his hearer, 'Madame Desforêts was acting in St. Petersburg. She had with her a large company, and amongst them her own young sister, Elise Romey, a girl of eighteen. This girl had been always kept away from Madame Desforêts by her parents, who had never been sufficiently consoled by their eldest daughter's artistic success for the infamy of her life.'

Rose started indignantly. Langham gave her no time to speak.

'Elise Romey, however, had developed a passion for the stage. Her parents were respectable — and you know young girls in France are brought up strictly. She knew next to nothing of her sister's escapades. But she knew that she was held to be the greatest actress in Europe — the photographs in the shops told her that she was beautiful. She conceived a romantic passion for the woman whom she had last seen when she was a child of five, and actuated partly by this hungry affection, partly by her own longing wish to become an actress, she escaped from home and joined Madame Desforêts in the South of France. Madame Desforêts seems at first to have been pleased to have

her. The girl's adoration pleased her vanity. Her presence with her gave her new opportunities of posing. I believe,' and Langham gave a little dry laugh, 'they were photographed together at Marseilles with their arms round each other's necks, and the photograph had an immense success. However, on the way to St. Petersburg, difficulties arose. Elise was pretty, in a *blonde* childish way, and she caught the attention of the *jeune premier* of the company, a man' — the speaker became somewhat embarrassed — 'whom Madame Desforêts seems to have regarded as her particular property. There were scenes at different towns on the journey. Elise became frightened — wanted to go home. But the elder sister, having begun tormenting her, seems to have determined to keep her hold on her, as a cat keeps and tortures a mouse — mainly for the sake of annoying the man of whom she was jealous. They arrived at St. Petersburg in the depth of winter. The girl was worn out with travelling, unhappy, and ill. One night in Madame Desforêts's apartment there was a supper-party, and after it a horrible quarrel. No one exactly knows what happened. But towards twelve o'clock that night Madame Desforêts turned her young sister in evening-dress, a light shawl round her, out into the snowy streets of St. Petersburg, barred the door behind her, and revolver in hand dared the wretched man who had caused the *fracas* to follow her.'

Rose sat immoveable. She had grown pale, but the firelight was not revealing.

Langham turned away from her towards the blaze, holding out his hands to it mechanically.

'The poor child,' he said, after a pause, in a lower voice, 'wandered about for some hours. It was a frightful night — the great capital was quite strange to her. She was insulted — fled this way and that — grew benumbed with cold and terror, and was found unconscious in the early morning under the archway of a house some two miles from her sister's lodgings.'

There was a dead silence. Then Rose drew a long quivering breath.

'I do not believe it!' she said passionately. 'I cannot believe it!'

'It was amply proved at the time,' said Langham drily, 'though of course Madame Desforêts tried to put her own colour on it. But I told you I had private information. On one of the floors of the house where Elise Romey was picked up, lived a young university professor. He is editing an important Greek text, and has lately had business at the Museum. I made friends with him there. He walked home with me this afternoon, saw the announcement of Madame Desforêts's coming, and poured out the story. He and his wife nursed the unfortunate girl with devotion. She lived just a week, and died of inflammation of the lungs. I never in my life heard anything so pitiful as his description of her delirium, her terror, her appeals, her shivering misery of cold.'

There was a pause.

'She is not a woman,' he said presently, between his teeth. 'She is a wild beast.'

Still there was silence, and still he held out his hand to the flame which Rose too was staring at. At last he turned round.

'I have told you a shocking story,' he said hurriedly. 'Perhaps I ought not to have done it. But, as you sat there talking so lightly, so gaily, it suddenly became to me utterly intolerable that that woman should ever sit here in this room — talk to you — call you by your name — laugh with you — touch your hand! Not even your wilfulness shall carry you so far — you *shall* not do it!'

He hardly knew what he said. He was driven on by a passionate sense of physical repulsion to the notion of any contact between her pure fair youth and something malodorous and corrupt. And there was besides a wild unique excitement in claiming for once to stay — to control her.

Rose lifted her head slowly. The fire was bright. He saw the tears in her eyes, tears of intolerable pity for another girl's awful story. But through the tears something gleamed — a kind of exultation — the exultation which the magician feels when he has called spirits from the vasty deep, and after long doubt and difficult invocation they rise at last before his eyes.

'I will never see her again,' she said in a low wavering voice, but she too was hardly conscious of her own words. Their looks were on each other; the ruddy capricious light touched her glowing cheeks, her straight-lined grace, her white hand. Suddenly from the gulf of another's misery into which they had both been looking there had sprung up, by the strange contrariety of human things, a heat and intoxication of feeling, wrapping them round, blotting out the rest of the world from them like a golden mist. 'Be always thus!' her parted lips, her liquid eyes were saying to

him. His breath seemed to fail him; he was lost in bewilderment.

There were sounds outside — Catherine's voice. He roused himself with a supreme effort.

'To-night — at Lady Charlotte's?'

'To-night,' she said, and held out her hand.

A sudden madness seized him — he stooped — his lips touched it — it was hastily drawn away, and the door opened.

*Borough Farm, Surrey*

*Where "Robert Elsmere" was written*

## CHAPTER XXXV

In the first place, my dear aunt,' said Mr. Flaxman, throwing himself back in his chair in front of Lady Charlotte's drawing-room fire, 'you may spare your admonitions, because it is becoming more and more clear to me that, whatever my sentiments may be, Miss Leyburn never gives a serious thought to me.'

He turned to look at his companion over his shoulder. His tone and manner were perfectly gay, and Lady Charlotte was puzzled by him.

'Stuff and nonsense!' replied the lady with her usual emphasis; 'I never flatter you, Hugh, and I don't mean to begin now, but it would be mere folly not to recognise that you have advantages which must tell on the mind of any girl in Miss Leyburn's position.'

Hugh Flaxman rose, and, standing before the fire with his hands in his pockets, made what seemed to be a close inspection of his irreproachable trouser-knees.

'I am sorry for your theory, Aunt Charlotte,' he said, still stooping, 'but Miss Leyburn does n't care twopence about my advantages.'

'Very proper of you to say so,' returned Lady Charlotte sharply; 'the remark, however, my good sir, does more credit to your heart than your head.'

'In the next place,' he went on, undisturbed, 'why you should have done your best this whole winter to throw Miss Leyburn and me together, if you meant in the end to oppose my marrying her, I don't quite see.'

He looked up smiling. Lady Charlotte reddened ever so slightly.

'You know my weaknesses,' she said presently, with an effrontery which delighted her nephew. 'She is my latest novelty, she excites me, I can't do without her. As to you, I can't remember that you wanted much encouragement, but, I acknowledge, after all these years of resistance — resistance to my most legitimate efforts to dispose of you — there was a certain piquancy in seeing you caught at last!'

'Upon my word!' he said, throwing back his head with a not very cordial laugh, in which, however, his aunt joined. She was sitting opposite to him, her powerful loosely-gloved hands crossed over the rich velvet of her dress, her fair large face and greyish hair surmounted by a mighty cap, as vigorous, shrewd, and individual a type of English middle age as could be found. The room behind her and the second and third drawing-rooms were brilliantly lighted. Mr. Wynnstay was enjoying a cigar in peace in the smoking-room, while his wife and nephew were awaiting the arrival of the evening's guests upstairs.

Lady Charlotte's mind had been evidently much perturbed by the conversation with her nephew of which we are merely describing the latter half. She was labouring under an uncomfortable sense of being hoist with her own petard — an uncomfortable memory of a certain warning of her husband's, delivered at Murewell.

'And now,' said Mr. Flaxman, 'having confessed in so many words that you have done your best to bring me up to the fence, will you kindly recapitulate

the arguments why in your opinion I should not jump it?'

'Society, amusement, flirtation, are one thing,' she replied with judicial imperativeness, 'marriage is another. In these democratic days we must know everybody; we should only marry our equals.'

The instant, however, the words were out of her mouth, she regretted them. Mr. Flaxman's expression changed.

'I do not agree with you,' he said calmly, 'and you know I do not. You could not, I imagine, have relied much upon *that* argument.'

'Good gracious, Hugh!' cried Lady Charlotte crossly; 'you talk as if I were really the old campaigner some people suppose me to be. I have been amusing myself — I have liked to see you amused. And it is only the last few weeks, since you have begun to devote yourself so tremendously, that I have come to take the thing seriously at all. I confess, if you like, that I have got you into the scrape — now I want to get you out of it! I am not thin-skinned, but I hate family unpleasantnesses — and you know what the duke will say.'

'The duke be — translated!' said Flaxman coolly. 'Nothing of what you have said or could say on this point, my dear aunt, has the smallest weight with me. But Providence has been kinder to you and the duke than you deserve. Miss Leyburn does not care for me, and she does care — or I am very much mistaken — for somebody else.'

He pronounced the words deliberately, watching their effect upon her.

'What, that Oxford nonentity, Mr. Langham, the Elsmeres' friend? Ridiculous! What attraction could a man of that type have for a girl of hers?'

'I am not bound to supply an answer to that question,' replied her nephew. 'However, he is not a nonentity. Far from it! Ten years ago, when I was leaving Cambridge, he was certainly one of the most distinguished of the young Oxford tutors.'

'Another instance of what university reputation is worth!' said Lady Charlotte scornfully. It was clear that even in the case of a beauty whom she thought it beneath him to marry, she was not pleased to see her nephew ousted by the *force majeure* of a rival — and that a rival whom she regarded as an utter nobody, having neither marketable eccentricity, nor family, nor social brilliance to recommend him.

Flaxman understood her perplexity and watched her with critical amused eyes.

'I should like to know,' he said presently, with a curious slowness and suavity, 'I should greatly like to know why you asked him here to-night?'

'You know perfectly well that I should ask anybody — a convict, a crossing-sweeper — if I happened to be half an hour in the same room with him!'

Flaxman laughed.

'Well, it may be convenient to-night,' he said reflectively. 'What are we to do — some thought-reading?'

'Yes. It is n't a crush. I have only asked about thirty or forty people. Mr. Denman is to manage it.'

She mentioned an amateur thought-reader greatly in request at the moment.

Flaxman cogitated for a while and then propounded

a little plan to his aunt, to which she, after some demur, agreed.

'I want to make a few notes,' he said drily, when it was arranged; 'I should be glad to satisfy myself.'

When the Miss Leyburns were announced, Rose, though the younger, came in first. She always took the lead by a sort of natural right, and Agnes never dreamt of protesting. To-night the sisters were in white. Some soft creamy stuff was folded and draped about Rose's slim shapely figure in such a way as to bring out all its charming roundness and grace. Her neck and arms bore the challenge of the dress victoriously. Her red-gold hair gleamed in the light of Lady Charlotte's innumerable candles. A knot of dusky blue feathers on her shoulder, and a Japanese fan of the same colour, gave just that touch of purpose and art which the spectator seems to claim as the tribute answering to his praise in the dress of a young girl. She moved with perfect self-possession, distributing a few smiling looks to the people she knew as she advanced towards Lady Charlotte. Any one with a discerning eye could have seen that she was in that stage of youth when a beautiful woman is like a statue to which the master is giving the finishing touches. Life, the sculptor, had been at work upon her, refining here, softening there, planing away awkwardness, emphasising grace, disengaging as it were, week by week, and month by month, all the beauty of which the original conception was capable. And the process is one attended always by a glow and sparkle, a kind of effluence of youth and pleasure, which makes beauty more beautiful and grace more graceful.

The little murmur and rustle of persons turning to look, which had already begun to mark her entrance into a room, surrounded Rose as she walked up to Lady Charlotte. Mr. Flaxman, who had been standing absently silent, woke up directly she appeared, and went to greet her before his aunt.

'You failed us at rehearsal,' he said, with smiling reproach; 'we were all at sixes and sevens.'

'I had a sick mother, unfortunately, who kept me at home. Lady Charlotte, Catherine could n't come. Agnes and I are alone in the world. Will you chaperon us?'

'I don't know whether I will accept the responsibility to-night—in that new gown,' replied Lady Charlotte grimly, putting up her eye-glass to look at it and the wearer. Rose bore the scrutiny with a light smiling silence, even though she knew Mr. Flaxman was looking too.

'On the contrary,' she said, 'one always feels so particularly good and prim in a new frock.'

'Really? I should have thought it one of Satan's likeliest moments,' said Flaxman, laughing — his eyes, however, the while saying quite other things to her, as they finished their inspection of her dress.

Lady Charlotte threw a sharp glance first at him and then at Rose's smiling ease, before she hurried off to other guests.

'I have made a muddle as usual,' she said to herself in disgust, 'perhaps even a worse one than I thought!'

Whatever might be Hugh Flaxman's state of mind, however, he never showed greater self-possession than on this particular evening.

A few minutes after Rose's entry he introduced her for the first time to his sister Lady Helen. The Varleys had only just come up to town for the opening of Parliament, and Lady Helen had come to-night to Martin Street, all ardour to see Hugh's new adoration, and the girl whom all the world was beginning to talk about — both as a beauty and as an artist. She rushed at Rose, if any word so violent can be applied to anything so light and airy as Lady Helen's movements, caught the girl's hands in both hers, and, gazing up at her with undisguised admiration, said to her the prettiest, daintiest, most effusive things possible. Rose — who with all her lithe shapeliness, looked over-tall and even a trifle stiff beside the tiny bird-like Lady Helen — took the advances of Hugh Flaxman's sister with a pretty flush of flattered pride. She looked down at the small radiant creature with soft and friendly eyes, and Hugh Flaxman stood by, so far well pleased.

Then he went off to fetch Mr. Denman, the hero of the evening, to be introduced to her. While he was away, Agnes, who was behind her sister, saw Rose's eyes wandering from Lady Helen to the door, restlessly searching and then returning.

Presently through the growing crowd round the entrance Agnes spied a well-known form emerging.

'Mr. Langham! But Rose never told me he was to be here to-night, and how *dreadful* he looks!'

Agnes was so startled that her eyes followed Langham closely across the room. Rose had seen him at once; and they had greeted each other across the crowd. Agnes was absorbed, trying to analyse what had struck her so. The face was always melancholy,

always pale, but to-night it was ghastly, and from the whiteness of cheek and brow, the eyes, the jet-black hair stood out in intense and disagreeable relief. She would have remarked on it to Rose, but that Rose's attention was claimed by the young thought-reader, Mr. Denman, whom Mr. Flaxman had brought up. Mr. Denman was a fair-headed young Hercules, whose tremulous agitated manner contrasted oddly with his athlete's looks. Among other magnetisms he was clearly open to the magnetism of women, and he stayed talking to Rose, staring furtively at her the while from under his heavy lids, — much longer than the girl thought fair.

'Have you seen any experiments in the working of this new force before?' he asked her, with a solemnity which sat oddly on his commonplace bearded face.

'Oh yes!' she said flippantly. 'We have tried it sometimes. It is very good fun.'

He drew himself up. 'Not *fun*,' he said impressively, 'not fun. Thought-reading wants seriousness; the most tremendous things depend upon it. If established it will revolutionise our whole views of life. Even a Huxley could not deny that!'

She studied him with mocking eyes. 'Do you imagine this party to-night looks very serious?'

His face fell.

'One can seldom get people to take it scientifically,' he admitted, sighing. Rose, impatiently, thought him a most preposterous young man. Why was he not cricketing or shooting or exploring, or using the muscles Nature had given him so amply, to some decent practical purpose, instead of making a business out of

ruining his own nerves and other people's night after night in hot drawing-rooms? And when would he go away?

'Come, Mr. Denman,' said Flaxman, laying hands upon him; 'the audience is about collected, I think. Ah, there you are!' and he gave Langham a cool greeting. 'Have you seen anything yet of these fashionable dealings with the Devil?'

'Nothing. Are you a believer?'

Flaxman shrugged his shoulders. 'I never refuse an experiment of any kind,' he added, with an odd change of voice. 'Come, Denman.'

And the two went off. Langham came to a stand beside Rose, while old Lord Rupert, as jovial as ever, and bubbling over with gossip about the Queen's Speech, appropriated Lady Helen, who was the darling of all elderly men.

They did not speak. Rose sent him a ray from eyes full of a new Divine shyness. He smiled gently in answer to it, and full of her own young emotion, and of the effort to conceal it from all the world, she noticed none of that change which had struck Agnes.

And all the while, if she could have penetrated the man's silence! An hour before this moment Langham had vowed that nothing should take him to Lady Charlotte's that night. And yet here he was, riveted to her side, alive like any normal human being to every detail of her loveliness, shaken to his inmost being by the intoxicating message of her look, of the transformation which had passed in an instant over the teasing difficult creature of the last few months.

At Murewell his chagrin had been *not* to feel, *not* to

struggle, to have been cheated out of experience. Well, here *is* the experience in good earnest! And Langham is wrestling with it for dear life. And how little the exquisite child beside him knows of it, or of the man on whom she is spending her first wilful passion! She stands strangely exulting in her own strange victory over a life, a heart, which had defied and eluded her. The world throbs and thrills about her, the crowd beside her is all unreal, the air is full of whisper, of romance.

The thought-reading followed its usual course. A murder and its detection were given in dumb show. Then it was the turn of card-guessing, bank-note-finding, and the various other forms of telepathic hide and seek. Mr. Flaxman superintended them all, his restless eye wandering every other minute to the farther drawing-room in which the lights had been lowered, catching there always the same patch of black and white, — Rose's dress and the dark form beside her.

'Are you convinced? Do you believe?' said Rose, merrily looking up at her companion.

'In telepathy? Well — so far — I have not got beyond the delicacy and perfection of Mr. Denman's — muscular sensation. So much I am sure of!'

'Oh, but your scepticism is ridiculous!' she said gaily. 'We *know* that some people have an extraordinary power over others.'

'Yes, that certainly we know!' he answered, his voice dropping, an odd strained note in it. 'I grant you that.'

She trembled deliciously. Her eyelids fell. They stood together, conscious only of each other.

'Now,' said Mr. Denman, advancing to the doorway between the two drawing-rooms, 'I have done all I can — I am exhausted. But let me beg of you all to go on with some experiments amongst yourselves. Every fresh discovery of this power in a new individual is a gain to science. I believe about one in ten has some share of it. Mr. Flaxman and I will arrange everything, if any one will volunteer?'

The audience broke up into groups, laughing, chatting, suggesting this and that. Presently Lady Charlotte's loud dictatorial voice made itself heard, as she stood eye-glass in hand looking round the circle of her guests.

'Somebody must venture — we are losing time.'

Then the eye-glass stopped at Rose, who was now sitting tall and radiant on the sofa, her blue fan across her white knees. 'Miss Leyburn — you are always public-spirited — will you be victimised for the good of science?'

The girl got up with a smile.

'And Mr. Langham — will you see what you can do with Miss Leyburn? Hugh — we all choose her task, don't we — then Mr. Langham wills?'

Flaxman came up to explain. Langham had turned to Rose — a wild fury with Lady Charlotte and the whole affair sweeping through him. But there was no time to demur; that judicial eye was on them; the large figure and towering cap bent towards him. Refusal was impossible.

'Command me!' he said with a sudden straightening of the form and a flush on the pale cheek. 'I am afraid Miss Leyburn will find me a very bad partner.'

'Well, now then!' said Flaxman; 'Miss Leyburn, will you please go down into the library while we settle what you are to do!'

She went, and he held the door open for her. But she passed out unconscious of him — rosy, confused, her eyes bent on the ground.

'Now, then, what shall Miss Leyburn do?' asked Lady Charlotte in the same loud emphatic tone.

'If I might suggest something quite different from anything that has been yet tried,' said Mr. Flaxman, 'suppose we require Miss Leyburn to kiss the hand of the little marble statue of Hope in the far drawing-room. What do you say, Langham?'

'What you please!' said Langham, moving up to him. A glance passed between the two men. In Langham's there was a hardly sane antagonism and resentment, in Flaxman's an excited intelligence.

'Now then,' said Flaxman coolly, 'fix your mind steadily on what Miss Leyburn is to do — you must take her hand — but, except in thought, you must carefully follow and not lead her. Shall I call her?'

Langham abruptly assented. He had a passionate sense of being watched — tricked. Why were he and she to be made a spectacle for this man and his friends! A mad irrational indignation surged through him.

Then she was led in blindfolded, one hand stretched out feeling the air in front of her. The circle of people drew back. Mr. Flaxman and Mr. Denman prepared, note-book in hand, to watch the experiment. Langham moved desperately forward.

But the instant her soft trembling hand touched his, as though by enchantment, the surrounding scene, the

faces, the lights, were blotted out from him. He forgot his anger, he forgot everything but her and this thing she was to do. He had her in his grasp — he was the man, the master — and what enchanting readiness to yield in the swaying pliant form! In the distance far away gleamed the statue of Hope, a child on tiptoe, one outstretched arm just visible from where he stood.

There was a moment's silent expectation. Every eye was riveted on the two figures — on the dark handsome man — on the blindfolded girl.

At last Rose began to move gently forward. It was a strange wavering motion. The breath came quickly through her slightly parted lips; her bright colour was ebbing. She was conscious of nothing but the grasp in which her hand was held — otherwise her mind seemed a blank. Her state during the next few seconds was not unlike the state of some one under the partial influence of an anæsthetic; a benumbing grip was laid on all her faculties; and she knew nothing of how she moved or where she was going.

Suddenly the trance cleared away. It might have lasted half an hour or five seconds, for all she knew. But she was standing beside a small marble statue in the farthest drawing-room, and her lips had on them a slight sense of chill, as though they had just been laid to something cold.

She pulled off the handkerchief from her eyes. Above her was Langham's face, a marvellous glow and animation in every line of it.

'Have I done it?' she asked in a tremulous whisper.

For the moment her self-control was gone. She was still bewildered.

He nodded, smiling.

'I am so glad,' she said, still in the same quick whisper, gazing at him. There was the most adorable *abandon* in her whole look and attitude. He could but just restrain himself from taking her in his arms, and for one bright flashing instant each saw nothing but the other.

The heavy curtain which had partially hidden the door of the little old-fashioned powder-closet as they approached it, and through which they had swept without heeding, was drawn back with a rattle.

'She has done it! Hurrah!' cried Mr. Flaxman. 'What a rush that last was, Miss Leyburn! You left us all behind.'

Rose turned to him, still dazed, drawing her hand across her eyes. A rush? She had known nothing about it.

Mr. Flaxman turned and walked back, apparently to report to his aunt, who, with Lady Helen, had been watching the experiment from the main drawing-room. His face was a curious mixture of gravity and the keenest excitement. The gravity was mostly sharp compunction. He had satisfied a passionate curiosity, but in the doing of it he had outraged certain instincts of breeding and refinement which were now revenging themselves.

'Did she do it exactly?' said Lady Helen eagerly.

'Exactly,' he said, standing still.

Lady Charlotte looked at him significantly. But he would not see her look.

'Lady Charlotte, where is my sister?' said Rose, coming up from the back room, looking now nearly as white as her dress.

It appeared that Agnes had just been carried off by a lady who lived on Campden Hill close to the Leyburns, and who had been obliged to go at the beginning of the last experiment. Agnes, torn between her interest in what was going on and her desire to get back to her mother, had at last hurriedly accepted this Mrs. Sherwood's offer of a seat in her carriage, imagining that her sister would want to stay a good deal later, and relying on Lady Charlotte's promise that she should be safely put into a hansom.

'I must go,' said Rose, putting her hand to her head. 'How tiring this is! How long did it take, Mr. Flaxman?'

'Exactly three minutes,' he said, his gaze fixed upon her with an expression that only Lady Helen noticed.

'So little! Good-night, Lady Charlotte!' and giving her hand first to her hostess, then to Mr. Flaxman's bewildered sister, she moved away into the crowd.

'Hugh, of course you are going down with her?' exclaimed Lady Charlotte under her breath. 'You must. I promised to see her safely off the premises.'

He stood immoveable. Lady Helen with a reproachful look made a step forward, but he caught her arm.

'Don't spoil sport,' he said, in a tone which, amid the hum of discussion caused by the experiment, was heard only by his aunt and sister.

They looked at him — the one amazed, the other grimly observant — and caught a slight significant motion of the head towards Langham's distant figure.

Langham came up and made his farewells. As he turned his back, Lady Helen's large astonished eyes followed him to the door.

'Oh, Hugh!' was all she could say as they came back to her brother.

'Never mind, Nellie,' he whispered, touched by the bewildered sympathy of her look; 'I will tell you all about it to-morrow. I have not been behaving well, and am not particularly pleased with myself. But for her it is all right. Poor, pretty little thing!'

And he walked away into the thick of the conversation.

Downstairs the hall was already full of people waiting for their carriages. Langham, hurrying down, saw Rose coming out of the cloak-room muffled up in brown furs, a pale child-like fatigue in her looks which set his heart beating faster than ever.

'Miss Leyburn, how are you going home?'

'Will you ask for a hansom, please?'

'Take my arm,' he said, and she clung to him through the crush till they reached the door.

Nothing but private carriages were in sight. The street seemed blocked, a noisy tumult of horses and footmen and shouting men with lanterns. Which of them suggested, 'Shall we walk a few steps?' At any rate, here they were, out in the wind and the darkness, every step carrying them farther away from that moving patch of noise and light behind.

'We shall find a cab at once in Park Lane,' he said. 'Are you warm?'

'Perfectly.'

A fur hood fitted round her face, to which the colour was coming back. She held her cloak tightly round her, and her little feet, fairly well shod, slipped in and out on the dry frosty pavement.

Suddenly they passed a huge unfinished house, the building of which was being pushed on by electric light. The great walls, ivory white in the glare, rose into the purply-blue of the starry February sky, and as they passed within the power of the lamps, each saw with noonday distinctness every line and feature in the other's face. They swept on — the night, with its alternations of flame and shadow, an unreal and enchanted world about them. A space of darkness succeeded the space of daylight. Behind them in the distance was the sound of hammers and workmen's voices; before them the dim trees of the park. Not a human being was in sight. London seemed to exist to be the mere dark friendly shelter of this wandering of theirs.

A blast of wind blew her cloak out of her grasp. But before she could close it again, an arm was flung around her. She could not speak or move, she stood passive, conscious only of the strangeness of the wintry wind, and of this warm breast against which her cheek was laid.

'Oh, stay there!' a voice said close to her ear. 'Rest there — pale tired child — pale tired little child!'

That moment seemed to last an eternity. He held her close, cherishing and protecting her from the cold — not kissing her — till at length she looked up with bright eyes, shining through happy tears.

'Are you sure at last?' she said, strangely enough, speaking out of the far depths of her own thought to his.

'Sure!' he said, his expression changing. 'What can I be sure of? I am sure that I am not worth your lov-

ing, sure that I am poor, insignificant, obscure, that if you give yourself to me you will be miserably throwing yourself away!'

She looked at him, still smiling, a white sorceress weaving spells about him in the darkness. He drew her lightly gloved hand through his arm, holding the fragile fingers close in his, and they moved on.

'Do you know,' he repeated,—a tone of intense melancholy replacing the tone of passion,—'how little I have to give you?'

'I know,' she answered, her face turned shyly away from him, her words coming from under the fur hood which had fallen forward a little,—'I know that—that—you are not rich, that you distrust yourself, that—'

'Oh, hush,' he said, and his voice was full of pain. 'You know so little; let me paint myself. I have lived alone, for myself, in myself, till sometimes there seems to be hardly anything left in me to love or be loved; nothing but a brain, a machine that exists only for certain selfish ends. My habits are the tyrants of years; and at Murewell, though I loved you there, they were strong enough to carry me away from you. There is something paralysing in me, which is always forbidding me to feel, to will. Sometimes I think it is an actual physical disability—the horror that is in me of change, of movement, of effort. Can you bear with me? Can you be poor? Can you live a life of monotony? Oh, impossible!' he broke out, almost putting her hand away from him. 'You, who ought to be a queen of this world, for whom everything bright and brilliant is waiting if you will but stretch out your hand to it. It

is a crime — an infamy — that I should be speaking to you like this!'

Rose raised her head. A passing light shone upon her. She was trembling and pale again, but her eyes were unchanged.

'No, no,' she said wistfully; 'not if you love me.'

He hung above her, an agony of feeling in the fine rigid face, of which the beautiful features and surfaces were already worn and blanched by the life of thought. What possessed him was not so much distrust of circumstance as doubt, hideous doubt, of himself, of this very passion beating within him. She saw nothing, meanwhile, but the self-depreciation which she knew so well in him, and against which her love in its rash ignorance and generosity cried out.

'You will not say you love me!' she cried, with hurrying breath. 'But I know — I know — you do.'

Then her courage sinking, ashamed, blushing, once more turning away from him — 'At least, if you don't, I am very — very — unhappy.'

The soft words flew through his blood. For an instant he felt himself saved, like Faust, — saved by the surpassing moral beauty of one moment's impression. That she should need him, that his life should matter to hers! They were passing the garden wall of a great house. In the deepest shadow of it, he stooped suddenly and kissed her.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

LANGHAM parted with Rose at the corner of Martin Street. She would not let him take her any farther.

'I will say nothing,' she whispered to him, as he put her into a passing hansom, wrapping her cloak warmly round her, 'till I see you again. To-morrow?'

'To-morrow morning,' he said, waving his hand to her, and in another instant he was facing the north wind alone.

He walked on fast towards Beaumont Street, but by the time he reached his destination midnight had struck. He made his way into his room where the fire was still smouldering, and striking a light, sank into his large reading-chair, beside which the volumes used in the afternoon lay littered on the floor.

He was suddenly penetrated with the cold of the night, and hung shivering over the few embers which still glowed. What had happened to him? In this room, in this chair, the self-forgetting excitement of that walk, scarcely half an hour old, seems to him already long passed — incredible almost.

And yet the brain was still full of images, the mind still full of a hundred new impressions. That fair head against his breast, those soft confiding words, those yielding lips. Ah! it is the poor, silent, insignificant student that has conquered. It is he, not the successful man of the world, that has held that young and beautiful girl in his arms, and heard from her the

sweetest and humblest confession of love. Fate can have neither wit nor conscience to have ordained it so; but fate has so ordained it. Langham takes note of his victory, takes dismal note also that the satisfaction of it has already half-departed.

So the great moment has come and gone! The one supreme experience, which life and his own will had so far rigidly denied him, is his. He has felt the torturing thrill of passion,—he has evoked such an answer as all men might envy him,—and fresh from Rose's kiss, from Rose's beauty, the strange maimed soul falls to a pitiless analysis of his passion, her response! One moment he is at her feet in a voiceless trance of gratitude and tenderness; the next—is nothing what it promises to be!—and has the boon already, now that he has it in his grasp, lost some of its beauty, just as the sea-shell drawn out of the water, where its lovely iridescence tempted eye and hand, loses half its fairy charm?

The night wore on. Outside an occasional cab or cart would rattle over the stones of the street, an occasional voice or step would penetrate the thin walls of the house, bringing a shock of sound into that silent upper room. Nothing caught Langham's ear. He was absorbed in the dialogue which was to decide his life.

Opposite to him, as it seemed, there sat a spectral reproduction of himself, his true self, with whom he held a long and ghastly argument.

'But I love her!—I love her! A little courage—a little effort—and I too can achieve what other men achieve. I have gifts, great gifts. Mere contact with her, the mere necessities of the situation, will drive

me back to life, teach me how to live normally, like other men. I have not forced her love — it has been a free gift. Who can blame me if I take it, if I cling to it, as the man freezing in a crevasse clutches the rope thrown to him?'

To which the pale spectre self said scornfully —

'*Courage* and *effort* may as well be dropped out of your vocabulary. They are words that you have no use for. Replace them by two others — *habit* and *character*. Slave as you are of habit, of the character you have woven for yourself out of years of deliberate living — what wild unreason to imagine that love can unmake, can re-create! What you are, you are to all eternity. Bear your own burden, but for God's sake beguile no other human creature into trusting you with theirs!'

'But she loves me! Impossible that I should crush and tear so kind, so warm a heart! Poor child — poor child! I have played on her pity. I have won all she had to give. And now to throw her gift back in her face — oh monstrous — oh inhuman!' and the cold drops stood on his forehead.

But the other self was inexorable. 'You have acted as you were bound to act — as any man may be expected to act in whom will and manhood and true human kindness are dying out, poisoned by despair and the tyranny of the critical habit. But at least do not add another crime to the first. What in God's name have you to offer a creature of such claims, such ambitions? You are poor — you must go back to Oxford — you must take up the work your soul loathes — grow more soured, more embittered — maintain a use-

less degrading struggle, till her youth is done, her beauty wasted, and till you yourself have lost every shred of decency and dignity, even that decorous outward life in which you can still wrap yourself from the world! Think of the little house — the children — the money difficulties — she, spiritually starved, every illusion gone, — you incapable soon of love, incapable even of pity, conscious only of a dull rage with her, yourself, the world! Bow the neck — submit — refuse that long agony for yourself and her, while there is still time. *Kismet — Kismet!*'

And spread out before Langham's shrinking soul there lay a whole dismal Hogarthian series, image leading to image, calamity to calamity, till in the last scene of all the maddened inward sight perceived two figures, two grey and withered figures, far apart, gazing at each other with cold and sunken eyes across dark rivers of sordid irremediable regret.

The hours passed away, and in the end, the spectre self, a cold and bloodless conqueror, slipped back into the soul which remorse and terror, love and pity, a last impulse of hope, a last stirring of manhood, had been alike powerless to save.

The February dawn was just beginning when he dragged himself to a table and wrote.

Then for hours afterwards he sat sunk in his chair, the stupor of fatigue broken every now and then by a flash of curious introspection. It was a base thing which he had done—it was also a strange thing psychologically; and at intervals he tried to understand it, to track it to its causes.

At nine o'clock he crept out into the frosty daylight,

found a commissionaire who was accustomed to do errands for him, and sent him with a letter to Lerwick Gardens.

On his way back he passed a gunsmith's, and stood looking fascinated at the shining barrels. Then he moved away, shaking his head, his eyes gleaming as though the spectacle of himself had long ago passed the bounds of tragedy — become farcical even.

'I should only stand a month — arguing — with my finger on the trigger.'

In the little hall his landlady met him, gave a start at the sight of him, and asked him if he ailed and if she could do anything for him. He gave her a sharp answer and went upstairs, where she heard him dragging books and boxes about as though he were packing.

A little later Rose was standing at the dining-room window of No. 27, looking on to a few trees bedecked with rime which stood outside. The ground and roofs were white, a promise of sun was struggling through the fog. So far everything in these unfrequented Campden Hill roads was clean, crisp, enlivening, and the sparkle in Rose's mood answered to that of Nature.

Breakfast had just been cleared away. Agnes was upstairs with Mrs. Leyburn. Catherine, who was staying in the house for a day or two, was in a chair by the fire reading some letters forwarded to her from Bedford Square.

He would appear some time in the morning, she supposed. With an expression half-rueful, half-amused, she fell to imagining his interview with Catherine, with her mother. Poor Catherine! Rose feels herself happy enough to allow herself a good honest pang of

remorse for much of her behaviour to Catherine this winter; how thorny she has been, how unkind often, to this sad changed sister. And now this will be a fresh blow! 'But afterwards, when she has got over it, — when she knows that it makes me happy, — that nothing else would make me happy, — then she will be reconciled, and she and I perhaps will make friends, all over again, from the beginning. I won't be angry or hard over it — poor Cathie!'

And with regard to Mr. Flaxman. As she stands there waiting idly for what destiny may send her, she puts herself through a little light catechism about this other friend of hers. He had behaved somewhat oddly towards her of late; she begins now to remember that her exit from Lady Charlotte's house the night before had been a very different matter from the royally attended leave-takings, presided over by Mr. Flaxman, which generally befell her there. Had he understood? With a little toss of her head she said to herself that she did not care if it was so. 'I have never encouraged Mr. Flaxman to think I was going to marry him.'

But of course Mr. Flaxman will consider she has done badly for herself. So will Lady Charlotte and all her outer world. They will say she is dismally throwing herself away, and her mother, no doubt influenced by the clamour, will take up very much the same line.

What matter! The girl's spirit seemed to rise against all the world. There was a sort of romantic exaltation in her sacrifice of herself, a jubilant looking forward to remonstrance, a wilful determination to overcome it. That she was about to do the last thing she could have

been expected to do, gave her pleasure. Almost all artistic faculty goes with a love of surprise and caprice in life. Rose had her full share of the artistic love for the impossible and the difficult.

Besides — success! To make a man hope and love, and live again — *that* shall be her success. She leaned against the window, her eyes filling, her heart very soft.

Suddenly she saw a commissionaire coming up the little flagged passage to the door. He gave in a note, and immediately afterwards the dining-room door opened.

'A letter for you, Miss,' said the maid.

Rose took it — glanced at the handwriting. A bright flush — a surreptitious glance at Catherine who sat absorbed in a wandering letter from Mrs. Darcy. Then the girl carried her prize to the window and opened it.

Catherine read on, gathering up the Murewell names and the details as some famished gleaner might gather up the scattered ears on a plundered field. At last something in the silence of the room, and of the other inmate in it, struck her.

'Rose,' she said, looking up, 'was that some one brought you a note?'

The girl turned with a start — a letter fell to the ground. She made a faint ineffectual effort to pick it up, and sank into a chair.

'Rose — darling!' cried Catherine, springing up, 'are you ill?'

Rose looked at her with a perfectly colourless fixed face, made a feeble negative sign, and then laying her arms on the breakfast-table in front of her, let her head fall upon them.

Catherine stood over her aghast. 'My darling — what is it? Come and lie down — take this water.'

She put some close to her sister's hand, but Rose pushed it away. 'Don't talk to me,' she said, with difficulty.

Catherine knelt beside her in helpless pain and perplexity, her cheek resting against her sister's shoulder as a mute sign of sympathy. What could be the matter? Presently her gaze travelled from Rose to the letter on the floor. It lay with the address uppermost, and she at once recognised Langham's handwriting. But before she could combine any rational ideas with this quick perception, Rose had partially mastered herself. She raised her head slowly and grasped her sister's arm.

'I was startled,' she said, a forced smile on her white lips. 'Last night Mr. Langham asked me to marry him — I expected him here this morning to consult with mamma and you. That letter is to inform me that — he made a mistake — and he is very sorry! So am I! It is so — so — bewildering!'

She got up restlessly and went to the fire as though shivering with cold. Catherine thought she hardly knew what she was saying. The elder sister followed her, and throwing an arm round her, pressed the slim irresponsive figure close. Her eyes were bright with anger, her lips quivering.

'That he should *dare!*' she cried. 'Rose — my poor little Rose.'

'Don't blame him!' said Rose, crouching down before the fire, while Catherine fell into the armchair

again. 'It does n't seem to count, from you — you have always been so ready to blame him!'

Her brow contracted; she looked frowning into the fire, her still colourless mouth working painfully.

Catherine was cut to the heart. 'Oh, Rose!' she said, holding out her hands, 'I will blame no one, dear. I seem hard — but I love you so. Oh, tell me — you would have told me everything once!'

There was the most painful yearning in her tone. Rose lifted a listless right hand and put it into her sister's outstretched palms. But she made no answer, till suddenly, with a smothered cry, she fell towards Catherine.

'Catherine! I cannot bear it. I said I loved him — he kissed me — I could kill myself and him.'

Catherine never forgot the mingled tragedy and domesticity of the hour that followed — the little familiar morning sounds in and about the house, maids running up and down stairs, tradesmen calling, bells ringing, — and here, at her feet, a spectacle of moral and mental struggle which she only half-understood, but which wrung her inmost heart. Two strains of feeling seemed to be present in Rose — a sense of shock, of wounded pride, of intolerable humiliation, and a strange intervening passion of pity, not for herself but for Langham, which seemed to have been stirred in her by his letter. But though the elder questioned, and the younger seemed to answer, Catherine could hardly piece the story together, nor could she find the answer to the question filling her own indignant heart, 'Does she love him?'

At last Rose got up from her crouching position by

the fire and stood, a white ghost of herself, pushing back the bright encroaching hair from eyes that were dry and feverish.

'If I could only be angry — downright angry,' she said, more to herself than Catherine, 'it would do one good.'

'Give others leave to be angry for you!' cried Catherine.

'Don't!' said Rose, almost fiercely, drawing herself away. 'You don't know. It is a fate. Why did we ever meet? You may read his letter; you must — you misjudge him — you always have. No, no' — and she nervously crushed the letter in her hand — 'not yet. But you shall read it some time — you and Robert too. Married people always tell one another. It is due to him, perhaps due to me too,' and a hot flush transfigured her paleness for an instant. 'Oh, my head! Why does one's mind affect one's body like this? It shall not — it is humiliating! "Miss Leyburn has been jilted and cannot see visitors," — that is the kind of thing. Catherine, when you have finished that document, will you kindly come and hear me practise my last Raff — I am going. Good-bye.'

She moved to the door, but Catherine had only just time to catch her, or she would have fallen over a chair from sudden giddiness.

'Miserable!' she said, dashing a tear from her eyes. 'I must go and lie down then in the proper missish fashion. Mind, on your peril, Catherine, not a word to any one but Robert. I shall tell Agnes. And Robert is not to speak to me! No, don't come — I will go alone.'

And warning her sister back, she groped her way upstairs. Inside her room, when she had locked the door, she stood a moment upright with the letter in her hand, — the blotted incoherent scrawl, where Langham had for once forgotten to be literary, where every pitiable half-finished sentence pleaded with her — even in the first smart of her wrong — for pardon, for compassion, as towards something maimed and paralysed from birth, unworthy even of her contempt. Then the tears began to rain over her cheeks.

'I was not good enough — I was not good enough — God would not let me!'

And she fell on her knees beside the bed, the little bit of paper crushed in her hands against her lips. Not good enough for what? *To save?*

How lightly she had dreamed of healing, redeeming, changing! And the task is refused her. It is not so much the cry of personal desire that shakes her as she kneels and weeps, nor is it mere wounded woman's pride. It is a strange stern sense of law. Had she been other than she is — more loving, less self-absorbed, loftier in motive — he could not have loved her so, have left her so. Deep undeveloped forces of character stir within her. She feels herself judged — and with a righteous judgement — issuing inexorably from the facts of life and circumstance.

Meanwhile Catherine was shut up downstairs with Robert, who had come over early to see how the household fared.

Robert listened to the whole luckless story with astonishment and dismay. This particular possibility

of mischief had gone out of his mind for some time. He had been busy in his East End work. Catherine had been silent. Over how many matters they would once have discussed with open heart was she silent now?

'I ought to have been warned,' he said, with quick decision, 'if you knew this was going on. I am the only man among you, and I understand Langham better than the rest of you. I might have looked after the poor child a little.'

Catherine accepted the reproach mutely as one little smart the more. However, what had she known? She had seen nothing unusual of late, nothing to make her think a crisis was approaching. Nay, she had flattered herself that Mr. Flaxman, whom she liked, was gaining ground.

Meanwhile Robert stood pondering anxiously what could be done. Could anything be done?

'I must go and see him,' he said presently. 'Yes, dearest, I must. Impossible the thing should be left so! I am his old friend, — almost her guardian. You say she is in great trouble — why, it may shadow her whole life! No — he must explain things to us — he is bound to — he shall. It may be something comparatively trivial in the way after all — money or prospects or something of the sort. You have not seen the letter, you say? It is the last marriage in the world one could have desired for her — but if she loves him, Catherine, if she loves him —'

He turned to her — appealing, remonstrating. Catherine stood pale and rigid. Incredible that he should think it right to intermeddle — to take the smallest step towards reversing so plain a declaration

of God's will! She could not sympathise — she would not consent. Robert watched her in painful indecision. He knew that she thought him indifferent to her true reason for finding some comfort even in her sister's trouble — that he seemed to her mindful only of the passing human misery, indifferent to the eternal risk.

They stood sadly looking at one another. Then he snatched up his hat.

'I must go,' he said in a low voice; 'it is right.'

And he went — stepping, however, with the best intentions in the world, into a blunder.

Catherine sat painfully struggling with herself after he had left her. Then some one came into the room — some one with pale looks and flashing eyes. It was Agnes.

'She just let me in to tell me, and put me out again,' said the girl — her whole, even, cheerful self one flame of scorn and wrath. 'What are such creatures made for, Catherine — why do they exist?'

Meanwhile, Robert had trudged off through the frosty morning streets to Langham's lodgings. His mood was very hot by the time he reached his destination, and he climbed the staircase to Langham's room in some excitement. When he tried to open the door after the answer to his knock bidding him enter, he found something barring the way. 'Wait a little,' said the voice inside, 'I will move the case.'

With difficulty the obstacle was removed and the door opened. Seeing his visitor, Langham stood for a moment in sombre astonishment. The room was littered with books and packing-cases with which he had been busy.

'Come in,' he said, not offering to shake hands.

Robert shut the door, and, picking his way among the books, stood leaning on the back of the chair Langham pointed out to him. Langham paused opposite to him, his waving jet-black hair falling forward over the marble pale face which had been Robert's young ideal of manly beauty.

The two men were only six years distant in age, but so strong is old association that Robert's feeling towards his friend had always remained in many respects the feeling of the undergraduate towards the don. His sense of it now filled him with a curious awkwardness.

'I know why you are come,' said Langham slowly, after a scrutiny of his visitor.

'I am here by a mere accident,' said the other, thinking perfect frankness best. 'My wife was present when her sister received your letter. Rose gave her leave to tell me. I had gone up to ask after them all, and came on to you, — of course on my own responsibility entirely! Rose knows nothing of my coming — nothing of what I have to say.'

He paused, struck against his will by the looks of the man before him. Whatever he had done during the past twenty-four hours he had clearly had the grace to suffer in the doing of it.

'You can have nothing to say!' said Langham, leaning against the chimneypiece and facing him with black, darkly-burning eyes. 'You know me.'

Never had Robert seen him under this aspect. All the despair, all the bitterness hidden under the languid student's exterior of every day, had, as it were, risen

to the surface. He stood at bay, against his friend, against himself.

'No!' exclaimed Robert stoutly, 'I do not know you in the sense you mean. I do not know you as the man who could beguile a girl on to a confession of love, and then tell her that for you marriage was too great a burden to be faced!'

Langham started, and then closed his lips in an iron silence. Robert repented him a little. Langham's strange individuality always impressed him against his will.

'I did not come simply to reproach you, Langham,' he went on, 'though I confess to being very hot! I came to try and find out — for myself only, mind — whether what prevents you from following up what I understand happened last night is really a matter of feeling, or a matter of outward circumstance. If, upon reflexion, you find that your feeling for Rose is not what you imagined it to be, I shall have my own opinion about your conduct — but I shall be the first to acquiesce in what you have done this morning. If, on the other hand, you are simply afraid of yourself in harness, and afraid of the responsibilities of practical married life, I cannot help begging you to talk the matter over with me, and let us face it together. Whether Rose would ever, under any circumstances, get over the shock of this morning I have not the remotest idea. But' — and he hesitated — 'it seems the feeling you appealed to yesterday has been of long growth. You know perfectly well what havoc a thing of this kind *may* make in a girl's life. I don't say it will. But, at any rate, it is all so desperately

serious I could not hold my hand. I am doing what is no doubt wholly unconventional; but I am your friend and her brother; I brought you together, and I ask you to take me into counsel. If you had but done it before!'

There was a moment's dead silence.

'You cannot pretend to believe,' said Langham at last, with the same sombre self-containedness, 'that a marriage with me would be for your sister-in-law's happiness?'

'I don't know what to believe!' cried Robert. 'No,' he added frankly, 'no; when I saw you first attracted by Rose at Murewell I disliked the idea heartily; I was glad to see you separated; *à priori*, I never thought you suited to each other. But reasoning that holds good when a thing is wholly in the air looks very different when a man has committed himself and another, as you have done.'

Langham surveyed him for a moment, then shook his hair impatiently from his eyes and rose from his bending position by the fire.

'Elsmere, there is nothing to be said! I have behaved as vilely as you please. I have forfeited your friendship. But I should be an even greater fiend and weakling than you think me if, in cold blood, I could let your sister run the risk of marrying me. I could not trust myself — you may think of the statement as you like — I should make her *miserable*. Last night I had not parted from her an hour before I was utterly and irrevocably sure of it. My habits are my masters. I believe,' he added slowly, his eyes fixed weirdly on something beyond Robert, 'I could

even grow to *hate* what came between me and them!'

Was it the last word of the man's life? It struck Robert with a kind of shiver.

'Pray Heaven,' he said with a groan, getting up to go, 'you may not have made her miserable already!'

'Did it hurt her so much?' asked Langham, almost inaudibly, turning away, Robert's tone meanwhile calling up a new and scorching image in the subtle brain tissue.

'I have not seen her,' said Robert abruptly; 'but when I came in I found my wife — who has no light tears — weeping for her sister.'

His voice dropped as though what he were saying were in truth too pitiful and too intimate for speech.

Langham said no more. His face had become a marble mask again.

'Good-bye!' said Robert, taking up his hat with a dismal sense of having got foolishly through a fool's errand. 'As I said to you before, what Rose's feeling is at this moment I cannot even guess. Very likely she would be the first to repudiate half of what I have been saying. And I see that you will not talk to me — you will not take me into your confidence and speak to me not only as her brother but as your friend. And — and — are you going? What does this mean?'

He looked interrogatively at the open packing-cases.

'I am going back to Oxford,' said the other briefly. 'I cannot stay in these rooms, in these streets.'

Robert was sore perplexed. What real — nay, what terrible — suffering in the face and manner, and yet

how futile, how needless! He felt himself wrestling with something intangible and phantom-like, wholly unsubstantial, and yet endowed with a ghastly indefinite power over human life.

'It is very hard,' he said hurriedly, moving nearer, 'that our old friendship should be crossed like this. Do trust me a little! You are always undervaluing yourself. Why not take a friend into council sometimes when you sit in judgement on yourself and your possibilities? Your own perceptions are all warped!'

Langham, looking at him, thought his smile one of the most beautiful and one of the most irrelevant things he had ever seen.

'I will write to you, Elsmere,' he said, holding out his hand, 'speech is impossible to me. I never had any words except through my pen.'

Robert gave it up. In another minute Langham was left alone.

But he did no more packing for hours. He spent the middle of the day sitting dumb and immoveable in his chair. Imagination was at work again more feverishly than ever. He was tortured by a fixed image of Rose, suffering and paling.

And after a certain number of hours he could no more bear the incubus of this thought than he could put up with the flat prospects of married life the night before. He was all at sea, barely sane, in fact. His life had been so long purely intellectual that this sudden strain of passion and fierce practical interests seemed to unhinge him, to destroy his mental balance.

He bethought him. This afternoon he knew she had a last rehearsal at Searle House. Afterwards her cus-

tom was to come back from St. James's Park to High Street, Kensington, and walk up the hill to her own home. He knew it, for on two occasions after these rehearsals he had been at Lerwick Gardens, waiting for her, with Agnes and Mrs. Leyburn. Would she go this afternoon? A subtle instinct told him that she would.

It was nearly six o'clock that evening when Rose, stepping out from the High Street station, crossed the main road and passed into the darkness of one of the streets leading up the hill. She had forced herself to go, and she would go alone. But as she toiled along she felt weary and bruised all over. She carried with her a heart of lead — a sense of utter soreness — a longing to hide herself from eyes and tongues. The only thing that dwelt softly in the shaken mind was a sort of inconsequent memory of Mr. Flaxman's manner at the rehearsal. Had she looked so ill? She flushed hotly at the thought, and then realised again, with a sense of childish comfort, the kind look and voice, the delicate care shown in shielding her from any unnecessary exertion, the brotherly grasp of the hand with which he had put her into the cab that took her to the Underground.

Suddenly, where the road made a dark turn to the right, she saw a man standing. As she came nearer she saw that it was Langham.

'You!' she cried, stopping.

He came up to her. There was a light over the doorway of a large detached house not far off, which threw a certain illumination over him, though it left her in shadow. He said nothing, but he held out both his

hands mutely. She fancied rather than saw the pale emotion of his look.

'What?' she said, after a pause. 'You think to-night is last night! You and I have nothing to say to each other, Mr. Langham.'

'I have everything to say,' he answered, under his breath; 'I have committed a crime — a villainy.'

'And it is not pleasant to you?' she said, quivering. 'I am sorry — I cannot help you. But you are wrong — it was no crime — it was necessary and profitable, like the doses of one's childhood! Oh! I might have guessed you would do this! No, Mr. Langham, I am in no danger of an interesting decline. I have just played my *concerto* very fairly. I shall not disgrace myself at the concert to-morrow night. You may be at peace — I have learnt several things to-day that have been salutary — very salutary.'

She paused. He walked beside her while she pelted him — unresisting, helplessly silent.

'Don't come any farther,' she said resolutely after a minute, turning to face him. 'Let us be quits! I was a temptingly easy prey. I bear no malice. And do not let me break your friendship with Robert; that began before this foolish business — it should outlast it. Very likely *we* shall be friends again, like ordinary people, some day. I do not imagine your wound is very deep, and —'

But no! Her lips closed; not even for pride's sake, and retort's sake, will she desecrate the past, belittle her own first love.

She held out her hand. It was very dark. He could see nothing among her furs but the gleaming whiteness

of her face. The whole personality seemed centred in the voice—the half-mocking vibrating voice. He took her hand and dropped it instantly.

'You do not understand,' he said hopelessly — feeling as though every phrase he uttered, or could utter, were equally fatuous, equally shameful. 'Thank Heaven, you will never understand.'

'I think I do,' she said, with a change of tone, and paused. He raised his eyes involuntarily, met hers, and stood bewildered. What *was* the expression in them? It was yearning — but not the yearning of passion. 'If things had been different — if one could change the self — if the past were nobler!' — was that the cry of them? A painful humility — a boundless pity — the rise of some moral wave within her he could neither measure nor explain — these were some of the impressions which passed from her to him. A fresh gulf opened between them, and he saw her transformed on the farther side, with, as it were, a loftier gesture, a nobler stature, than had ever yet been hers.

He bent forward quickly, caught her hands, held them for an instant to his lips in a convulsive grasp, dropped them, and was gone.

He gained his own room again. There lay the medley of his books, his only friends, his real passion. Why had he ever tampered with any other?

'*It was not love — not love!*' he said to himself, with an accent of infinite relief as he sank into his chair. '*Her* smart will heal.'

# BOOK VI

## NEW OPENINGS

## CHAPTER XXXVII

TEN days after Langham's return to Oxford, Elsmere received a characteristic letter from him, asking whether their friendship was to be considered as still existing or at an end. The calm and even proud melancholy of the letter showed a considerable subsidence of that state of half-frenzied irritation and discomfort in which Elsmere had last seen him. The writer, indeed, was clearly settling down into another period of pessimistic quietism such as that which had followed upon his first young efforts at self-assertion years before. But this second period bore the marks of an even profounder depression of all the vital forces than the first, and as Elsmere, with a deep sigh, half-angry, half-relenting, put down the letter, he felt the conviction that no fresh influence from outside would ever again be allowed to penetrate the solitude of Langham's life. In comparison with the man who had just addressed him, the tutor of his undergraduate recollection was a vigorous and sociable human being.

The relenting grew upon him, and he wrote a sensible affectionate letter in return. Whatever had been his natural feelings of resentment, he said, he could not realise, now that the crisis was past, that he cared less about his old friend. 'As far as we two are concerned, let us forget it all. I could hardly say this, you will easily imagine, if I thought that you had done serious or irreparable harm. But both my wife and I

agree now in thinking that by a pure accident, as it were, and to her own surprise, Rose has escaped either. It will be some time, no doubt, before she will admit it. A girl is not so easily disloyal to her past. But to us it is tolerably clear. At any rate, I send you our opinion for what it is worth, believing that it will and must be welcome to you.'

Rose, however, was not so long in admitting it. One marked result of that new vulnerableness of soul produced in her by the shock of that February morning was a great softening towards Catherine. Whatever might have been Catherine's intense relief when Robert returned from his abortive mission, she never afterwards let a disparaging word towards Langham escape her lips to Rose. She was tenderness and sympathy itself, and Rose, in her curious reaction against her old self, and against the noisy world of flattery and excitement in which she had been living, turned to Catherine as she had never done since she was a tiny child. She would spend hours in a corner of the Bedford Square drawing-room, pretending to read, or play with little Mary, in reality recovering, like some bruised and trodden plant, under the healing influence of thought and silence.

One day, when they were alone in the firelight, she startled Catherine by saying with one of her old odd smiles:—

'Do you know, Cathie, how I always see myself nowadays? It is a sort of hallucination. I see a girl at the foot of a precipice. She has had a fall, and she is sitting up, feeling all her limbs. And, to her great astonishment, there is no bone broken!'

And she held herself back from Catherine's knee lest her sister should attempt to caress her, her eyes bright and calm. Nor would she allow an answer, drowning all that Catherine might have said in a sudden rush after the child, who was wandering round them in search of a playfellow.

In truth, Rose Leyburn's girlish passion for Edward Langham had been a kind of accident unrelated to the main forces of character. He had crossed her path in a moment of discontent, of aimless revolt and longing, when she was but fresh emerged from the cramping conditions of her childhood and trembling on the brink of new and unknown activities. His intellectual prestige, his melancholy, his personal beauty, his very strangenesses and weaknesses, had made a deep impression on the girl's immature romantic sense. His resistance had increased the charm, and the interval of angry resentful separation had done nothing to weaken it. As to the months in London, they had been one long duel between herself and him — a duel which had all the fascination of difficulty and uncertainty, but in which pride and caprice had dealt and sustained a large proportion of the blows. Then, after a moment of intoxicating victory, Langham's endangered habits and threatened individuality had asserted themselves once for all. And from the whole long struggle — passion, exultation, and crushing defeat — it often seemed to her that she had gained neither joy nor irreparable grief, but a new birth of character, a soul!

It may be easily imagined that Hugh Flaxman felt a peculiarly keen interest in Langham's disappearance. On the afternoon of the Searle House rehearsal he had

awaited Rose's coming in a state of extraordinary irritation. He expected a blushing *fiancée*, in a fool's paradise, asking by manner, if not by word, for his congratulations, and taking a decent feminine pleasure perhaps in the pang she might suspect in him. And he had already taken *his* pleasure in the planning of some double-edged congratulations.

Then up the steps of the concert platform there came a pale tired girl, who seemed specially to avoid his look, who found a quiet corner and said hardly a word to anybody till her turn came to play.

His revulsion of feeling was complete. After her piece he made his way up to her, and was her watchful unobtrusive guardian for the rest of the afternoon.

He walked home after he had put her into her cab in a whirl of impatient conjecture.

'As compared to last night, she looks this afternoon as if she had had an illness! What on earth has that philandering ass been about? If he did not propose to her last night, he ought to be shot — and if he did, *à fortiori*, for clearly she is *miserable*. But what a brave child! How she played her part! I wonder whether she thinks that *I* saw nothing, like all the rest! Poor little cold hand!'

Next day in the street he met Elsmere, turned and walked with him, and by dint of leading the conversation a little discovered that Langham had left London.

Gone! But not without a crisis — that was evident. During the din of preparations for the Searle House concert, and during the meetings which it entailed,

now at the Varleys', now at the house of some other connexion of his — for the concert was the work of his friends, and given in the town house of his decrepit great-uncle, Lord Daniel—he had many opportunities of observing Rose. And he felt a soft indefinable change in her which kept him in a perpetual answering vibration of sympathy and curiosity. She seemed to him for the moment to have lost her passionate relish for living, that relish which had always been so marked with her. Her bubble of social pleasure was pricked. She did everything she had to do, and did it admirably. But all through she was to his fancy absent and *distraite*, pursuing through the tumult of which she was often the central figure some inner meditations of which neither he nor any one else knew anything. Some eclipse had passed over the girl's light self-satisfied temper; some searching thrill of experience had gone through the whole nature. She had suffered, and she was quietly fighting down her suffering without a word to anybody.

Flaxman's guesses as to what had happened came often very near the truth, and the mixture of indignation and relief with which he received his own conjectures amused himself.

'To think,' he said to himself once, with a long breath, 'that that creature was never at a public school, and will go to his death without any one of the kickings due to him!'

Then his very next impulse, perhaps, would be an impulse of gratitude towards this same 'creature,' towards the man who had released a prize he had had the tardy sense to see was not meant for him. *Free*

again — to be loved, to be won! There was the fact of facts after all.

His own future policy, however, gave him much anxious thought. Clearly at present the one thing to be done was to keep his own ambitions carefully out of sight. He had the skill to see that she was in a state of reaction, of moral and mental fatigue. What she mutely seemed to ask of her friends was not to be made to feel.

He took his cue accordingly. He talked to his sister. He kept Lady Charlotte in order. After all her eager expectation on Hugh's behalf, Lady Helen had been dumfoundered by the sudden emergence of Langham at Lady Charlotte's party for their common discomfiture. Who was the man? — why, what did it all mean? Hugh had the most provoking way of giving you half his confidence. To tell you he was seriously in love, and to omit to add the trifling item that the girl in question was probably on the point of engaging herself to somebody else! Lady Helen made believe to be angry, and it was not till she had reduced Hugh to a whimsical penitence and a full confession of all he knew or suspected, that she consented, with as much loftiness as the physique of an elf allowed her, to be his good friend again, and to play those cards for him which at the moment he could not play for himself.

So in the cheeriest daintiest way Rose was made much of by both brother and sister. Lady Helen chatted of gowns and music and people, whisked Rose and Agnes off to this party and that, brought fruit and flowers to Mrs. Leyburn, made pretty deferential love to Catherine, and generally, to Mrs. Pierson's disgust,

became the girls' chief chaperon in a fast-filling London. Meanwhile, Mr. Flaxman was always there to befriend or amuse his sister's *protégées* — always there, but never in the way. He was bantering, sympathetic, critical, laudatory, what you will; but all the time he preserved a delicate distance between himself and Rose, a bright nonchalance and impersonality of tone towards her which made his companionship a perpetual tonic. And, between them, he and Helen coerced Lady Charlotte. A few inconvenient inquiries after Rose's health, a few unexplained stares and 'humphs' and grunts, a few irrelevant disquisitions on her nephew's merits of head and heart, were all she was able to allow herself. And yet she was inwardly seething with a mass of sentiments, to which it would have been pleasant to give expression — anger with Rose for having been so blind and so presumptuous as to prefer some one else to Hugh; anger with Hugh for his persistent disregard of her advice and the duke's feelings; and a burning desire to know the precise why and wherefore of Langham's disappearance. She was too lofty to become Rose's aunt without a struggle, but she was not too lofty to feel the hungriest interest in her love-affairs.

But, as we have said, the person who for the time profited most by Rose's shaken mood was Catherine. The girl coming over, restless under her own smart, would fall to watching the trial of the woman and the wife, and would often perforce forget herself and her smaller woes in the pity of it. She stayed in Bedford Square once for a week, and then for the first time she

realised the profound change which had passed over the Elsmeres' life. As much tenderness between husband and wife as ever — perhaps more expression of it even than before, as though from an instinctive craving to hide the separateness below from each other and from the world. But Robert went his way, Catherine hers. Their spheres of work lay far apart; their interests were diverging fast; and though Robert at any rate was perpetually resisting, all sorts of fresh invading silences were always coming in to limit talk, and increase the number of sore points which each avoided. Robert was hard at work in the East End under Murray Edwardes's auspices. He was already known to certain circles as a seceder from the Church who was likely to become both powerful and popular. Two articles of his in the *Nineteenth Century*, on disputed points of Biblical criticism, had distinctly made their mark, and several of the veterans of philosophical debate had already taken friendly and flattering notice of the new writer. Meanwhile Catherine was teaching in Mr. Clarendon's Sunday-school, and attending his prayer-meetings. The more expansive Robert's energies became, the more she suffered, and the more the small daily opportunities for friction multiplied. Soon she could hardly bear to hear him talk about his work, and she never opened the number of the *Nineteenth Century* which contained his papers. Nor had he the heart to ask her to read them.

Murray Edwardes had received Elsmere, on his first appearance in R——, with a cordiality and a helpfulness of the most self-effacing kind. Robert had begun with assuring his new friend that he saw no chance,

at any rate for the present, of his formally joining the Unitarians.

'I have not the heart to pledge myself again just yet! And I own I look rather for a combination from many sides than for the development of any now existing sect. But supposing,' he added, smiling, 'supposing I do in time set up a congregation and a service of my own, is there really room for you and me? Should I not be infringing on a work I respect a great deal too much for anything of the sort?'

Edwardes laughed the notion to scorn.

The parish, as a whole, contained twenty thousand persons. The existing churches, which, with the exception of St. Wilfrid's, were miserably attended, provided accommodation at the outside for three thousand. His own chapel held four hundred, and was about half full.

'You and I may drop our lives here,' he said, his pleasant friendliness darkened for a moment by the look of melancholy which London work seems to develop even in the most buoyant of men, 'and only a few hundred persons, at the most, be ever the wiser. Begin with us — then make your own circle.'

And he forthwith carried off his visitor to the point from which, as it seemed to him, Elsmere's work might start, viz., a lecture-room half a mile from his own chapel, where two helpers of his had just established an independent venture.

Murray Edwardes had at the time an interesting and miscellaneous staff of lay-curates. He asked no questions as to religious opinions, but in general the men who volunteered under him — civil servants, a

young doctor, a briefless barrister or two — were men who had drifted from received beliefs, and found a pleasure and freedom in working for and with him they could hardly have found elsewhere. The two who had planted their outpost in what seemed to them a particularly promising corner of the district were men of whom Edwardes knew personally little. 'I have really not much concern with what they do,' he explained to Elsmere, 'except that they get a small share of our funds. But I know they want help, and if they will take you in, I think you will make something of it.'

After a tramp through the muddy winter streets, they came upon a new block of warehouses, in the lower windows of which some bills announced a night-school for boys and men. Here, to judge from the commotion round the doors, a lively scene was going on. Outside, a gang of young roughs were hammering at the doors, and shrieking witticisms through the keyhole. Inside, as soon as Murray Edwardes and Elsmere, by dint of good-humour and strong shoulders, had succeeded in shoving their way through and shutting the door behind them, they found a still more animated performance in progress. The schoolroom was in almost total darkness; the pupils, some twenty in number, were racing about, like so many shadowy demons, pelting each other and their teachers with the 'dips' which, as the buildings were new, and not yet fitted for gas, had been provided to light them through their three R's. In the middle stood the two philanthropists they were in search of, freely bedaubed with tallow, one employed in boxing a boy's ears, the

other in saving a huge inkbottle whereon some enterprising spirit had just laid hands by way of varying the rebel ammunition. Murray Edwardes, who was in his element, went to the rescue at once, helped by Robert. The boy-minister, as he looked, had been, in fact, 'bow' of the Cambridge Eight, and possessed muscles which men twice his size might have envied. In three minutes he had put a couple of ringleaders into the street by the scruff of the neck, relit a lamp which had been turned out, and got the rest of the rioters in hand. Elsmere backed him ably, and in a very short time they had cleared the premises.

Then the four looked at each other, and Edwardes went off into a shout of laughter.

'My dear Wardlaw, my condolences to your coat! But I don't believe if I were a rough myself I could resist "dips." Let me introduce a friend — Mr. Elsmere — and if you will have him, a recruit for your work. It seems to me another pair of arms will hardly come amiss to you!'

The short red-haired man addressed shook hands with Elsmere, scrutinising him from under bushy eyebrows. He was panting and beplastered with tallow, but the inner man was evidently quite unruffled, and Elsmere liked the shrewd Scotch face and grey eyes.

'It is n't only a pair of arms we want,' he remarked drily, 'but a bit of science behind them. Mr. Elsmere, I observed, can use his.'

Then he turned to a tall affected-looking youth with a large nose and long fair hair, who stood gasping with his hands upon his sides, his eyes, full of a moody

wrath, fixed on the wreck and disarray of the schoolroom.

'Well, Mackay, have they knocked the wind out of you? My friend and helper — Mr. Elsmere. Come and sit down, won't you, a minute. They've left us the chairs, I perceive, and there's a spark or two of fire. Do you smoke? Will you light up?'

The four men sat on chatting some time, and then Wardlaw and Elsmere walked home together. It had been all arranged. Mackay, a curious morbid fellow, who had thrown himself into Unitarianism and charity mainly out of opposition to an orthodox and bourgeois family, and who had a great idea of his own social powers, was somewhat grudging and ungracious through it all. But Elsmere's proposals were much too good to be refused. He offered to bring to the undertaking his time, his clergyman's experience, and as much money as might be wanted. Wardlaw listened to him cautiously for an hour, took stock of the whole man physically and morally, and finally said, as he very quietly and deliberately knocked the ashes out of his pipe, —

'All right, I'm your man, Mr. Elsmere. If Mackay agrees, I vote we make you captain of this venture.'

'Nothing of the sort,' said Elsmere. 'In London I am a novice; I come to learn, not to lead.'

Wardlaw shook his head with a little shrewd smile. Mackay faintly endorsed his companion's offer, and the party broke up.

That was in January. In two months from that time, by the natural force of things, Elsmere, in spite of diffidence and his own most sincere wish to avoid

a premature leadership, had become the head and heart of the Elgood Street undertaking, which had already assumed much larger proportions. Wardlaw was giving him silent approval and invaluable help, while young Mackay was in the first uncomfortable stages of a hero-worship which promised to be exceedingly good for him.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

THERE were one or two curious points connected with the beginnings of Elsmere's venture in North R——, one of which may just be noticed here. Wardlaw, his predecessor and colleague, had speculatively little or nothing in common with Elsmere or Murray Edwardes. He was a devoted and orthodox Comtist, for whom Edwardes had provided an outlet for the philanthropic passion, as he had for many others belonging to far stranger and remoter faiths.

By profession he was a barrister, with a small and struggling practice. On this practice, however, he had married, and his wife, who had been a doctor's daughter and a national school-mistress, had the same ardours as himself. They lived in one of the dismal little squares near the Goswell Road, and had two children. The wife, as a Positivist mother is bound to do, tended and taught her children entirely herself. She might have been seen any day wheeling their perambulator through the dreary streets of a dreary region; she was their Providence, their deity, the representative to them of all tenderness and all authority. But when her work with them was done, she would throw herself into charity organisation cases, into efforts for the protection of workhouse servants, into the homeliest acts of ministry towards the sick, till her dowdy little figure and her face, which but for the stress of London, of labour, and of poverty, would

have had a blunt fresh-coloured dairymaid's charm, became symbols of a Divine and sacred helpfulness in the eyes of hundreds of straining men and women.

The husband also, after a day spent in chambers, would give his evenings to teaching or committee work. They never allowed themselves to breathe even to each other that life might have brighter things to show them than the neighbourhood of the Goswell Road. There was a certain narrowness in their devotion; they had their bitternesses and ignorances like other people; but the more Robert knew of them the more profound became his admiration for that potent spirit of social help which in our generation Comtism has done so much to develop, even among those of us who are but moderately influenced by Comte's philosophy, and can make nothing of the religion of Humanity.

Wardlaw has no large part in the story of Elsmere's work in North R——. In spite of Robert's efforts, and against his will, the man of meaner gifts and commoner clay was eclipsed by that brilliant and persuasive something in Elsmere which a kind genius had infused into him at birth. And we shall see that in time Robert's energies took a direction which Wardlaw could not follow with any heartiness. But at the beginning Elsmere owed him much, and it was a debt he was never tired of honouring.

In the first place, Wardlaw's choice of the Elgood Street room as a fresh centre for civilising effort had been extremely shrewd. The district lying about it, as Robert soon came to know, contained a number of promising elements.

Close by the dingy street which sheltered their schoolroom rose the great pile of a new factory of artistic pottery, a rival on the north side of the river to Doulton's immense works on the south. The old winding streets near it, and the blocks of workmen's dwellings recently erected under its shadow, were largely occupied by the workers in its innumerable floors, and among these workers was a large proportion of skilled artisans, men often of a considerable amount of cultivation, earning high wages, and maintaining a high standard of comfort. A great many of them, trained in the art school which Murray Edwardes had been largely instrumental in establishing within easy distance of their houses, were men of genuine artistic gifts and accomplishment, and as the development of one faculty tends on the whole to set others working, when Robert, after a few weeks' work in the place, set up a popular historical lecture once a fortnight, announcing the fact by a blue-and-white poster in the schoolroom windows, it was the potters who provided him with his first hearers.

The rest of the parish was divided between a population of dock labourers, settled there to supply the needs of the great dock which ran up into the south-eastern corner of it, two or three huge breweries, and a colony of watchmakers, an offshoot of Clerkenwell, who lived together in two or three streets, and showed the same peculiarities of race and specialised training to be noticed in the more northerly settlement from which they had been thrown off like a swarm from a hive. Outside these well-defined trades there was, of course,

a warehouse population, and a mass of heterogeneous cadging and catering which went on chiefly in the riverside streets at the other side of the parish from Elgood Street, in the neighbourhood of St. Wilfrid's.

St. Wilfrid's at this moment seemed to Robert to be doing a very successful work among the lowest strata of the parish. From them at one end of the scale, and from the innumerable clerks and superintendents who during the daytime crowded the vast warehouses of which the district was full, its Lenten congregations, now in full activity, were chiefly drawn.

The Protestant opposition, which had shown itself so brutally and persistently in old days, was now, so far as outward manifestations went, all but extinct. The cassocked monk-like clergy might preach and 'process' in the open air as much as they pleased. The populace, where it was not indifferent, was friendly, and devoted living had borne its natural fruits.

A small incident, which need not be recorded, recalled to Elsmere's mind — after he had been working some six weeks in the district — the forgotten unwelcome fact that St. Wilfrid's was the very church where Newcome, first as senior curate and then as vicar, had spent those ten wonderful years into which Elsmere at Murewell had been never tired of inquiring. The thought of Newcome was a very sore thought. Elsmere had written to him announcing his resignation of his living immediately after his interview with the bishop. The letter had remained unanswered, and it was by now tolerably clear that the silence of its recipient meant a withdrawal from all friendly rela-

tions with the writer. Elsmere's affectionate sensitive nature took such things hardly, especially as he knew that Newcome's life was becoming increasingly difficult and embittered. And it gave him now a fresh pang to imagine how Newcome would receive the news of his quondam friend's 'infidel propaganda,' established on the very ground where he himself had all but died for those beliefs Elsmere had thrown over.

But Robert was learning a certain hardness in this London life which was not without its uses to character. Hitherto he had always swum with the stream, cheered by the support of all the great and prevailing English traditions. Here, he and his few friends were fighting a solitary fight apart from the organised system of English religion and English philanthropy. All the elements of culture and religion already existing in the place were against them. The clergy of St. Wilfrid's passed them with cold averted eyes; the old and *fainéant* rector of the parish church very soon let it be known what he thought as to the taste of Elsmere's intrusion on his parish, or as to the eternal chances of those who might take either him or Edwardes as guides in matters religious. His enmity did Elgood Street no harm, and the pretensions of the Church, in this Babel of twenty thousand souls, to cover the whole field, bore clearly no relation at all to the facts. But every little incident in this new struggle of his life cost Elsmere more perhaps than it would have cost other men. No part of it came easily to him. Only a high Utopian vision drove him on from day to day, bracing him to act and judge, if need be,

alone and for himself, approved only by conscience and the inward voice.

> 'Tasks in hours of insight willed
> Can be in hours of gloom fulfilled';

and it was that moment by the river which worked in him through all the prosaic and perplexing details of this new attempt to carry enthusiasm into life.

It was soon plain to him that in this teeming section of London the chance of the religious reformer lay entirely among the *upper working class*. In London, at any rate, all that is most prosperous and intelligent among the working class holds itself aloof — broadly speaking — from all existing spiritual agencies, whether of Church or Dissent.

Upon the genuine London artisan the Church has practically no hold whatever; and Dissent has nothing like the hold which it has on similar material in the great towns of the North. Towards religion in general the prevailing attitude is one of indifference tinged with hostility. 'Eight hundred thousand people in South London, of whom the enormous proportion belong to the working class, and among them, Church and Dissent nowhere — *Christianity not in possession.*' Such is the estimate of an Evangelical of our day; and similar laments come from all parts of the capital. The Londoner is on the whole more conceited, more prejudiced, more given over to crude theorising, than his North-country brother, the mill-hand, whose mere position, as one of a homogeneous and tolerably constant body, subjects him to a continuous discipline of intercourse and discussion. Our popular religion,

broadly speaking, means nothing to him. He is sharp enough to see through its contradictions and absurdities; he has no dread of losing what he never valued; his sense of antiquity, of history, is *nil;* and his life supplies him with excitement enough without the stimulants of 'other-worldliness.' Religion has been on the whole irrationally presented to him, and the result on his part has been an irrational breach with the whole moral and religious order of ideas.

But the race is quick-witted and imaginative. The Greek cities which welcomed and spread Christianity carried within them much the same elements as are supplied by certain sections of the London working class — elements of restlessness, of sensibility, of passion. The mere intermingling of races, which a modern capital shares with those old towns of Asia Minor, predisposes the mind to a greater openness and receptiveness, whether for good or evil.

As the weeks passed on, and after the first inevitable despondency produced by strange surroundings and an unwonted isolation had begun to wear off, Robert often found himself filled with a strange flame and ardour of hope! But his first steps had nothing to do with religion. He made himself quickly felt in the night-school, and as soon as he possibly could he hired a large room at the back of their existing room, on the same floor, where, on the recreation evenings, he might begin the story-telling, which had been so great a success at Murewell. The story-telling struck the neighbourhood as a great novelty. At first only a few youths straggled in from the front room, where dominoes and draughts and the illustrated papers

held seductive sway. The next night the number was increased, and by the fourth or fifth evening the room was so well filled both by boys and a large contingent of artisans, that it seemed well to appoint a special evening in the week for story-telling, or the recreation room would have been deserted.

In these performances Elsmere's aim had always been twofold — the rousing of moral sympathy and the awakening of the imaginative power pure and simple. He ranged the whole world for stories. Sometimes it would be merely some feature of London life itself — the history of a great fire, for instance, and its hairbreadth escapes; a collision in the river; a string of instances as true and homely and realistic as they could be made of the way in which the poor help one another. Sometimes it would be stories illustrating the dangers and difficulties of particular trades — a colliery explosion and the daring of the rescuers; incidents from the life of the great Northern iron-works, or from that of the Lancashire factories; or stories of English country life and its humours, given sometimes in dialect — Devonshire, or Yorkshire, or Cumberland — for which he had a special gift. Or, again, he would take the sea and its terrors — the immortal story of the *Birkenhead;* the deadly plunge of the *Captain;* the records of the lifeboats, or the fascinating story of the ships of science, exploring step by step, through miles of water, the past, the inhabitants, the hills and valleys of that underworld, that vast Atlantic bed, in which Mont Blanc might be buried without showing even his topmost snowfield above the plain of waves. Then at other times it would be the simple

fro ic and fancy of fiction — fairy-tale and legend, Greek myth or Icelandic saga, episodes from Walter Scott, from Cooper, from Dumas; to be followed perhaps on the next evening by the terse and vigorous biography of some man of the people — of Stephenson or Cobden, of Thomas Cooper or John Bright, or even of Thomas Carlyle.

One evening, some weeks after it had begun, Hugh Flaxman, hearing from Rose of the success of the experiment, went down to hear his new acquaintance tell the story of Monte Cristo's escape from the Château d'If. He started an hour earlier than was necessary, and with an admirable impartiality he spent that hour at St. Wilfrid's hearing vespers. Flaxman had a passion for intellectual or social novelty; and this passion was beguiling him into a close observation of Elsmere. At the same time he was crossed and complicated by all sorts of fastidious conservative fibres, and when his friends talked rationalism, it often gave him a vehement pleasure to maintain that a good Catholic or Ritualist service was worth all their arguments, and would outlast them. His taste drew him to the Church, so did a love of opposition to current 'isms.' Bishops counted on him for subscriptions, and High Church divines sent him their pamphlets. He never refused the subscriptions, but it should be added that with equal regularity *he* dropped the pamphlets into his waste-paper basket. Altogether a not very decipherable person in religious matters — as Rose had already discovered.

The change from the dim and perfumed spaces of St. Wilfrid's to the bare warehouse room with its

packed rows of listeners was striking enough. Here were no bowed figures, no *recueillement*. In the blaze of crude light every eager eye was fixed upon the slight elastic figure on the platform, each change in the expressive face, each gesture of the long arms and thin flexible hands, finding its response in the laughter, the attentive silence, the frowning suspense of the audience. At one point a band of young roughs at the back made a disturbance, but their neighbours had the offenders quelled and out in a twinkling, and the room cried out for a repetition of the sentences which had been lost in the noise. When Dantes, opening his knife with his teeth, managed to cut the strings of the sack, a gasp of relief ran through the crowd; when at last he reached *terra firma* there was a ringing cheer.

'What is he, d' ye know?' Flaxman heard a mechanic ask his neighbour, as Robert paused for a moment to get breath, the man jerking a grimy thumb in the story-teller's direction meanwhile. 'Seems like a parson somehow. But he ain't a parson.'

'Not he,' said the other laconically. 'Knows better. Most of 'em as comes down 'ere stuffs all they have to say as full of goody-goody as an egg's full of meat. If he wur that sort you would n't catch *me* here. Never heard him say anything in the "dear brethren" sort of style, and I've been 'ere most o' these evenings and to his lectures besides.'

'Perhaps he's one of your d—d sly ones,' said the first speaker dubiously. 'Means to shovel it in by and by.'

'Well, I don't know as I could n't stand it if he did,'

returned his companion. 'He'd let other fellers have their say, anyhow.'

Flaxman looked curiously at the speaker. He was a young man, a gasfitter — to judge by the contents of the basket he seemed to have brought in with him on his way from work — with eyes like live birds', and small emaciated features. During the story Flaxman had noticed the man's thin begrimed hand, as it rested on the bench in front of him, trembling with excitement.

Another project of Robert's, started as soon as he had felt his way a little in the district, was the scientific Sunday-school. This was the direct result of a paragraph in Huxley's Lay Sermons, where the hint of such a school was first thrown out. However, since the introduction of science teaching into the Board schools, the novelty and necessity of such a supplement to a child's ordinary education is not what it was. Robert set it up mainly for the sake of drawing the boys out of the streets in the afternoons, and providing them with some other food for fancy and delight than larking and smoking and penny-dreadfuls. A little simple chemical and electrical experiment went down greatly; so did a botany class, to which Elsmere would come armed with two stores of flowers, one to be picked to pieces, the other to be distributed according to memory and attention. A year before he had had a number of large coloured plates of tropical fruit and flowers prepared for him by a Kew assistant. These he would often set up on a large screen, or put up on the walls, till the dingy schoolroom became a bower of superb blossom and luxuriant leaf, a glow

of red and purple and orange. And then — still by the help of pictures — he would take his class on a tour through strange lands, talking to them of China or Egypt or South America, till they followed him up the Amazon, or into the pyramids or through the Pampas, or into the mysterious buried cities of Mexico, as the children of Hamelin followed the magic of the Pied Piper.

Hardly any of those who came to him, adults or children, while almost all of the artisan class, were of the poorest class. He knew it, and had laid his plans for such a result. Such work as he had at heart has no chance with the lowest in the social scale, in its beginnings. It must have something to work upon, and must penetrate downwards. He only can receive who already hath — there is no profounder axiom.

And meanwhile the months passed on, and he was still brooding, still waiting. At last the spark fell.

There, in the next street but one to Elgood Street, rose the famous Workmen's Club of North R——. It had been started by a former Liberal clergyman of the parish, whose main object, however, had been to train the workmen to manage it for themselves. His training had been, in fact, too successful. Not only was it now wholly managed by artisans, but it had come to be a centre of active, nay, brutal, opposition to the Church and faith which had originally fostered it. In organic connexion with it was a large debating-hall, in which the most notorious secularist lecturers held forth every Sunday evening; and next door to it, under its shadow and patronage, was a little dingy shop filled to overflowing with the coarsest freethink-

ing publications, Colonel Ingersoll's books occupying the place of honour in the window and the *Freethinker* placard flaunting at the door. Inside there was still more highly seasoned literature even than the *Freethinker* to be had. There was in particular a small halfpenny paper which was understood to be in some sense the special organ of the North R—— Club; which was at any rate published close by, and edited by one of the workmen founders of the club. This unsavoury sheet began to be more and more defiantly advertised through the parish as Lent drew on towards Passion Week, and the exertions of St. Wilfrid's and of the other churches, which were being spurred on by the Ritualists' success, became more apparent. Soon it seemed to Robert that every bit of boarding and every waste wall was filled with the announcement: —

'Read *Faith and Fools.* Enormous success. Our *Comic Life of Christ* now nearly completed. Quite the best thing of its kind going. Woodcut this week — Transfiguration.'

His heart grew fierce within him. One night in Passion Week he left the night-school about ten o'clock. His way led him past the club, which was brilliantly lit up, and evidently in full activity. Round the door there was a knot of workmen lounging. It was a mild moonlit April night, and the air was pleasant. Several of them had copies of *Faith and Fools,* and were showing the week's woodcut to those about them, with chuckles and spirts of laughter.

Robert caught a few words as he hurried past them, and stirred by a sudden impulse turned into the shop beyond, and asked for the paper. The woman handed

it to him, and gave him his change with a business-like *sang-froid,* which struck on his tired nerves almost more painfully than the laughing brutality of the men he had just passed.

Directly he found himself in another street he opened the paper under a lamp-post. It contained a caricature of the Crucifixion, the scroll emanating from Mary Magdalene's mouth, in particular, containing obscenities which cannot be quoted here.

Robert thrust it into his pocket and strode on, every nerve quivering.

'This is Wednesday in Passion Week,' he said to himself. 'The day after to-morrow is Good Friday!'

He walked fast in a northwesterly direction, and soon found himself within the City, where the streets were long since empty and silent. But he noticed nothing around him. His thoughts were in the distant East, among the flat roofs and white walls of Nazareth, the olives of Bethany, the steep streets and rocky ramparts of Jerusalem. He had seen them with the bodily eye, and the fact had enormously quickened his historical perception. The child of Nazareth, the moralist and teacher of Capernaum and Gennesaret, the strenuous seer and martyr of the later Jerusalem preaching — all these various images sprang into throbbing poetic life within him. That anything in human shape should be found capable of dragging this life and this death through the mire of a hideous and befouling laughter! Who was responsible? To what cause could one trace such a temper of mind towards such an object — present and militant as that temper is in all the crowded centres of working life throughout

modern Europe? The toiler of the world as he matures may be made to love Socrates or Buddha or Marcus Aurelius. It would seem often as though he could not be made to love Jesus! Is it the Nemesis that ultimately discovers and avenges the sublimest, the least conscious departure from simplicity and verity? — is it the last and most terrible illustration of a great axiom: '*Faith has a judge — in truth*'?

He went home and lay awake half the night pondering. If he could but pour out his heart! But though Catherine, the wife of his heart, of his youth, is there, close beside him, doubt and struggle and perplexity are alike frozen on his lips. He cannot speak without sympathy, and she will not hear except under a moral compulsion which he shrinks more and more painfully from exercising.

The next night was a story-telling night. He spent it in telling the legend of St. Francis. When it was over he asked the audience to wait a moment, and there and then — with the tender imaginative Franciscan atmosphere, as it were, still about them — he delivered a short and vigorous protest in the name of decency, good feeling, and common sense, against the idiotic profanities with which the whole immediate neighbourhood seemed to be reeking. It was the first time he had approached any religious matter directly. A knot of workmen sitting together at the back of the room looked at each other with a significant grimace or two.

When Robert ceased speaking one of them, an elderly watchmaker, got up and made a dry and cynical little speech, nothing moving but the thin lips in

the shrivelled mahogany face. Robert knew the man well. He was a Genevese by birth, Calvinist by blood, revolutionist by development. He complained that Mr. Elsmere had taken his audience by surprise; that a good many of those present understood the remarks he had just made as an attack upon an institution in which many of them were deeply interested; and that he invited Mr. Elsmere to a more thorough discussion of the matter, in a place where he could be both heard and answered.

The room applauded with some signs of suppressed excitement. Most of the men there were accustomed to disputation of the sort which any Sunday visitor to Victoria Park may hear going on there week after week. Elsmere had made a vivid impression; and the prospect of a fight with him had an unusual piquancy.

Robert sprang up. 'When you will,' he said. 'I am ready to stand by what I have just said in the face of you all, if you care to hear it.'

Place and particulars were hastily arranged, subject to the approval of the club committee, and Elsmere's audience separated in a glow of curiosity and expectation.

'Did n't I tell ye?' the gasfitter's snarling friend said to him. 'Scratch him and you find the parson. These upper-class folk, when they come among us poor ones, always seem to me just hunting for souls, as those Injuns he was talking about last week hunt for scalps. They can't get to heaven without a certain number of 'em slung about 'em.'

'Wait a bit!' said the gasfitter, his quick dark eyes betraying a certain raised inner temperature.

Next morning the North R—— Club was placarded with announcements that on Easter Eve next Robert Elsmere, Esq., would deliver a lecture in the Debating Hall on 'The Claim of Jesus upon Modern Life'; to be followed, as usual, by general discussion.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

It was the afternoon of Good Friday. Catherine had been to church at St. Paul's, and Robert, though not without some inward struggle, had accompanied her. Their midday meal was over, and Robert had been devoting himself to Mary, who had been tottering round the room in his wake, clutching one finger tight with her chubby hand. In particular, he had been coaxing her into friendship with a wooden Japanese dragon which wound itself in awful yet most seductive coils round the cabinet at the end of the room. It was Mary's weekly task to embrace this horror, and the performance went by the name of 'kissing the Jabberwock.' It had been triumphantly achieved, and, as the reward of bravery, Mary was being carried round the room on her father's shoulder, holding on mercilessly to his curls, her shining blue eyes darting scorn at the defeated monster.

At last Robert deposited her on the rug beside a fascinating farmyard which lay there spread out for her, and stood looking; not at the child, but at his wife.

'Catherine, I feel so much as Mary did three minutes ago!'

She looked up startled. The tone was light, but the sadness, the emotion of the eyes, contradicted it.

'I want courage,' he went on — 'courage to tell you something that may hurt you. And yet I ought to tell it.'

Her face took the shrinking expression which was so painful to him. But she waited quietly for what he had to say.

'You know, I think,' he said, looking away from her to the grey Museum outside, 'that my work in R—— has n't been religious as yet at all. Oh, of course, I have said things here and there, but I have n't delivered myself in any way. Now there has come an opening.'

And he described to her — while she shivered a little and drew herself together — the provocations which were leading him into a tussle with the North R—— Club.

'They have given me a very civil invitation. They are the sort of men after all whom it pays to get hold of, if one can. Among their fellows, they are the men who think. One longs to help them to think to a little more purpose.'

'What have you to give them, Robert?' asked Catherine after a pause, her eyes bent on the child's stocking she was knitting. Her heart was full enough already, poor soul. Oh, the bitterness of this Passion Week! He had been at her side often in church, but through all his tender silence and consideration she had divined the constant struggle in him between love and intellectual honesty, and it had filled her with a dumb irritation and misery indescribable. Do what she would, wrestle with herself as she would, there was constantly emerging in her now a note of anger, not with Robert, but, as it were, with those malign forces of which he was the prey.

'What have I to give them?' he repeated sadly.

'Very little, Catherine, as it seems to me to-night. But come and see.'

His tone had a melancholy which went to her heart. In reality he was in that state of depression which often precedes a great effort. But she was startled by his suggestion.

'Come with you, Robert? To the meeting of the secularist club!'

'Why not? I shall be there to protest against outrage to what both you and I hold dear. And the men are decent fellows. There will be no disturbance.'

'What are you going to do?' she asked in a low voice.

'I have been trying to think it out,' he said, with difficulty. 'I want simply, if I can, to transfer to their minds that image of Jesus of Nazareth which thought, and love, and reading have left upon my own. I want to make them realise for themselves the historical character, so far as it can be realised — to make them see for themselves the real figure, as it went in and out amongst men — so far as our eyes can now discern it.'

The words came quicker towards the end, while the voice sank — took the vibrating characteristic note the wife knew so well.

'How can that help them?' she said abruptly. 'Your historical Christ, Robert, will never win souls. If he was God, every word you speak will insult him. If he was man, he was not a good man!'

'Come and see,' was all he said, holding out his hand to her. It was in some sort a renewal of the scene at Les Avants, the inevitable renewal of an offer he felt bound to make, and she felt bound to resist.

She let her knitting fall and placed her hand in

his. The baby on the rug was alternately caressing and scourging a woolly baa-lamb, which was the fetish of her childish worship. Her broken incessant baby-talk, and the ringing kisses with which she atoned to the baa-lamb for each successive outrage, made a running accompaniment to the moved undertones of the parents.

'Don't ask me, Robert, don't ask me! Do you want me to come and sit thinking of last year's Easter Eve?'

'Heaven knows I was miserable enough last Easter Eve,' he said slowly.

'And now,' she exclaimed, looking at him with a sudden agitation of every feature, 'now you are not miserable? You are quite confident and sure? You are going to devote your life to attacking the few remnants of faith that still remain in the world?'

Never in her married life had she spoken to him with this accent of bitterness and hostility. He started and withdrew his hand, and there was a silence.

'I held once a wife in my arms,' he said presently, with a voice hardly audible, 'who said to me that she would never persecute her husband. But what is persecution if it is not the determination not to understand?'

She buried her face in her hands. 'I could not understand,' she said sombrely.

'And rather than try,' he insisted, 'you will go on believing that I am a man without faith, seeking only to destroy.'

'I know you think you have faith,' she answered, 'but how can it seem faith to me? "He that will not confess Me before men, him will I also deny before

My Father which is in heaven." Your unbelief seems to me more dangerous than these horrible things which shock you. For you can make it attractive, you can make it loved, as you once made the faith of Christ loved.'

He was silent. She raised her face presently, whereon were the traces of some of those quiet difficult tears which were characteristic of her, and went softly out of the room.

He stood a while leaning against the mantelpiece, deaf to little Mary's clamour, and to her occasional clutches at his knees, as she tried to raise herself on her tiny tottering feet. A sense as though of some fresh disaster was upon him. His heart was sinking, sinking within him. And yet none knew better than he that there was nothing fresh. It was merely that the scene had recalled to him anew some of those unpalatable truths which the optimist is always much too ready to forget.

Heredity, the moulding force of circumstance, the iron hold of the past upon the present — a man like Elsmere realises the working of these things in other men's lives with a singular subtlety and clearness, and is for ever overlooking them, running his head against them, in his own.

He turned and laid his arms on the chimneypiece, burying his head on them. Suddenly he felt a touch on his knee, and, looking down, saw Mary peering up, her masses of dark hair streaming back from the straining little face, the grave open mouth, and alarmed eyes.

'Fader, tiss! fader, tiss!' she said imperatively.

He lifted her up and covered the little brown cheeks with kisses. But the touch of the child only woke in him a fresh dread — the like of something he had often divined of late in Catherine. Was she actually afraid now that he might feel himself bound in future to take her child spiritually from her? The suspicion of such a fear in her woke in him a fresh anguish; it seemed a measure of the distance they had travelled from that old perfect unity.

'She thinks I could even become in time her tyrant and torturer,' he said to himself with measureless pain, 'and who knows — who can answer for himself? Oh, the puzzle of living!'

When she came back into the room, pale and quiet, Catherine said nothing, and Robert went to his letters. But after a while she opened his study-door.

'Robert, will you tell me what your stories are to be next week, and let me put out the pictures?'

It was the first time she had made any such offer. He sprang up with a flash in his grey eyes, and brought her a slip of paper with a list. She took it without looking at him. But he caught her in his arms, and for a moment in that embrace the soreness of both hearts passed away.

But if Catherine would not go, Elsmere was not left on this critical occasion without auditors from his own immediate circle. On the evening of Good Friday Flaxman had found his way to Bedford Square, and, as Catherine was out, was shown into Elsmere's study.

'I have come,' he announced, 'to try and persuade

you and Mrs. Elsmere to go down with me to Greenlaws to-morrow. My Easter party has come to grief, and it would be a real charity on your part to come and resuscitate it. Do! You look abominably fagged, and as if some country would do you good.'

'But I thought —' began Robert, taken aback.

'You thought,' repeated Flaxman coolly, 'that your two sisters-in-law were going down there with Lady Helen, to meet some musical folk. Well, they are not coming. Miss Leyburn thinks your mother-in-law not very well to-day, and does n't like to come. And your younger sister prefers also to stay in town. Helen is much disappointed, so am I. But —' And he shrugged his shoulders.

Robert found it difficult to make a suitable remark. His sisters-in-law were certainly inscrutable young women. This Easter party at Greenlaws, Mr. Flaxman's country house, had been planned, he knew, for weeks. And certainly nothing could be very wrong with Mrs. Leyburn, or Catherine would have been warned.

'I am afraid your plans must be greatly put out,' he said, with some embarrassment.

'Of course they are,' replied Flaxman, with a dry smile. He stood opposite Elsmere, his hands in his pockets.

'Will you have a confidence?' the bright eyes seemed to say. 'I am quite ready. Claim it if you like.'

But Elsmere had no intention of claiming it. The position of all Rose's kindred, indeed, at the present moment was not easy. None of them had the least knowledge of Rose's mind. Had she forgotten Lang-

ham? Had she lost her heart afresh to Flaxman? No one knew. Flaxman's absorption in her was clear enough. But his love-making, if it was such, was not of an ordinary kind, and did not always explain itself. And, moreover, his wealth and social position were elements in the situation calculated to make people like the Elsmeres particularly diffident and discreet. Impossible for them, much as they liked him, to make any of the advances!

No, Robert wanted no confidences. He was not prepared to take the responsibility of them. So, letting Rose alone, he took up his visitor's invitation to themselves, and explained the engagement for Easter Eve, which tied them to London.

'Whew!' said Hugh Flaxman, 'but that will be a shindy worth seeing. I must come!'

'Nonsense!' said Robert, smiling. 'Go down to Greenlaws, and go to church. That will be much more in your line.'

'As for church,' said Flaxman meditatively, 'if I put off my party altogether, and stay in town, there will be this further advantage, that, after hearing you on Saturday night, I can, with a blameless impartiality, spend the following day in St. Andrew's, Wells Street. Yes! I telegraph to Helen — she knows my ways — and I come down to protect you against an atheistical mob to-morrow night!'

Robert tried to dissuade him. He did not want Flaxman. Flaxman's Epicureanism, the easy tolerance with which, now that the effervescence of his youth had subsided, the man harboured and dallied with a dozen contradictory beliefs, were at times

peculiarly antipathetic to Elsmere. They were so now, just as heart and soul were nerved to an effort which could not be made at all without the nobler sort of self-confidence.

But Flaxman was determined.

'No,' he said; 'this one day we'll give — to heresy. Don't look so forbidding! In the first place, you won't see me; in the next, if you did, you would feel me as wax in your hands. I am like the man in Sophocles — always the possession of the last speaker! One day I am all for the Church. A certain number of chances in the hundred there still are, you will admit, that she is in the right of it. And if so, why should I cut myself off from a whole host of beautiful things not to be got outside her? But the next day — *vive* Elsmere and the Revolution! If only Elsmere could persuade me intellectually! But I never yet came across a religious novelty that seemed to me to have a leg of logic to stand on.'

He laid his hand on Robert's shoulder, his eyes twinkling with a sudden energy. Robert made no answer. He stood erect, frowning a little, his hands thrust far into the pockets of his light grey coat. He was in no mood to disclose himself to Flaxman. The inner vision was fixed with extraordinary intensity on quite another sort of antagonist, with whom the mind was continuously grappling.

'Ah, well — till to-morrow!' said Flaxman, with a smile, shook hands, and went.

Outside he hailed a cab and drove off to Lady Charlotte's.

He found his aunt and Mr. Wynnstay in the draw-

ing-room alone, one on either side of the fire. Lady Charlotte was reading the latest political biography with an apparent profundity of attention; Mr. Wynnstay was lounging and caressing the cat. But both his aunt's absorption and Mr. Wynnstay's nonchalance seemed to Flaxman overdone. He suspected a domestic breeze.

Lady Charlotte made him effusively welcome. He had come to propose that she should accompany him the following evening to hear Elsmere lecture.

'I advise you to come,' he said. 'Elsmere will deliver his soul, and the amount of soul he has to deliver in these dull days is astounding. A dowdy dress and a veil, of course. I will go down beforehand and see some one on the spot, in case there should be difficulties about getting in. Perhaps Miss Leyburn, too, might like to hear her brother-in-law?'

'*Really*, Hugh,' cried Lady Charlotte impatiently, 'I think you might take your snubbing with dignity. Her refusal this morning to go to Greenlaws was brusqueness itself. To my mind that young person gives herself airs!' And the Duke of Sedbergh's sister drew herself up with a rustle of all her ample frame.

'Yes, I was snubbed,' said Flaxman, unperturbed; 'that, however, is no reason why she should n't find it attractive to go to-morrow night.'

'And you will let her see that, just because you could n't get hold of her, you have given up your Easter party and left your sister in the lurch?'

'I never had excessive notions of dignity,' he replied composedly. 'You may make up any story you please. The real fact is that I want to hear Elsmere.'

'You had better go, my dear!' said her husband sardonically. 'I cannot imagine anything more piquant than an atheistic slum on Easter Eve.'

'Nor can I!' she replied, her combativeness rousing at once. 'Much obliged to you, Hugh. I will borrow my housekeeper's dress, and be ready to leave here at half-past seven.'

Nothing more was said of Rose, but Flaxman knew that she would be asked, and let it alone.

'Will his wife be there?' asked Lady Charlotte.

'Who? Elsmere's? My dear aunt, when you happen to be the orthodox wife of a rising heretic, your husband's opinions are not exactly the spectacular performance they are to you and me. I should think it most unlikely.'

'Oh, she persecutes him, does she?'

'She would n't be a woman if she did n't!' observed Mr. Wynnstay, *sotto voce*. The small dark man was lost in a great armchair, his delicate painter's hands playing with the fur of a huge Persian cat. Lady Charlotte threw him an eagle glance, and he subsided — for the moment.

Flaxman, however, was perfectly right. There had been a breeze. It had been just announced to the master of the house by his spouse that certain Socialist celebrities — who might any day be expected to make acquaintance with the police — were coming to dine at his table, to finger his spoons, and mix their diatribes with his champagne, on the following Tuesday. Overt rebellion had never served him yet, and he knew perfectly well that when it came to the point he should smile more or less affably upon these gentry,

as he had smiled upon others of the same sort before. But it had not yet come to the point, and his intermediate state was explosive in the extreme.

Mr. Flaxman dexterously continued the subject of the Elsmeres. Dropping his bantering tone, he delivered himself of a very delicate critical analysis of Catherine Elsmere's temperament and position, as in the course of several months his intimacy with her husband had revealed them to him. He did it well, with acuteness and philosophical relish. The situation presented itself to him as an extremely refined and yet tragic phase of the religious difficulty, and it gave him intellectual pleasure to draw it out in words.

Lady Charlotte sat listening, enjoying her nephew's crisp phrases, but also gradually gaining a perception of the human reality behind this word-play of Hugh's. That 'good heart' of hers was touched; the large imperious face began to frown.

'Dear me!' she said, with a little sigh. 'Don't go on, Hugh! I suppose it's because we all of us believe so little that the poor thing's point of view seems to one so unreal. All the same, however,' she added, regaining her usual rôle of magisterial common-sense, 'a woman, in my opinion, ought to go with her husband in religious matters.'

'Provided, of course, she sets him at nought in all others,' put in Mr. Wynnstay, rising and daintily depositing the cat. 'Many men, however, my dear, might be willing to compromise it differently. Granted a certain *modicum* of worldly conformity, they would not be at all indisposed to a conscience clause.'

He lounged out of the room, while Lady Charlotte

shrugged her shoulders with a look at her nephew in which there was an irrepressible twinkle. Mr. Flaxman neither heard nor saw. Life would have ceased to be worth having long ago had he ever taken sides in the smallest degree in this *ménage*.

Flaxman walked home again, not particularly satisfied with himself and his manœuvres. Very likely it was quite unwise of him to have devised another meeting between himself and Rose Leyburn so soon. Certainly she had snubbed him — there could be no doubt of that. Nor was he in much perplexity as to the reason. He had been forgetting himself, forgetting his rôle and the whole lie of the situation, and if a man will be an idiot he must suffer for it. He had distinctly been put back a move.

The facts were very simple. It was now nearly three months since Langham's disappearance. During that time Rose Leyburn had been, to Flaxman's mind, enchantingly dependent on him. He had played his part so well, and the beautiful high-spirited child had suited herself so naïvely to his acting! Evidently she had said to herself that his age, his former marriage, his relation to Lady Helen, his constant kindness to her and her sister, made it natural that she should trust him, make him her friend, and allow him an intimacy she allowed to no other male friend. And when once the situation had been so defined in her mind, how the girl's true self had come out! — what delightful moments that intimacy had contained for him!

He remembered how on one occasion he had been reading some Browning to her and Helen, in Helen's crowded belittered drawing-room, which seemed all

piano and photographs and lilies of the valley. He never could exactly trace the connexion between the passage he had been reading and what happened. Probably it was merely Browning's poignant passionate note that had affected her. In spite of all her proud bright reserve both he and Helen often felt through these weeks that just below this surface there was a heart which quivered at the least touch.

He finished the lines and laid down the book. Lady Helen heard her three-year-old boy crying upstairs, and ran up to see what was the matter. He and Rose were left alone in the scented firelit room. And a jet of flame suddenly showed him the girl's face turned away, convulsed with a momentary struggle for self-control. She raised a hand an instant to her eyes, not dreaming evidently that she could be seen in the dimness; and her gloves dropped from her lap.

He moved forward, stooped on one knee, and as she held out her hand for the gloves, he kissed the hand very gently, detaining it afterwards as a brother might. There was not a thought of himself in his mind. Simply he could not bear that so bright a creature should ever be sorry. It seemed to him intolerable, against the nature of things. If he could have procured for her at that moment a coerced and transformed Langham, a Langham fitted to make her happy, he could almost have done it; and, short of such radical consolation, the very least he could do was to go on his knee to her, and comfort her in tender brotherly fashion.

She did not say anything; she let her hand stay a moment, and then she got up, put on her veil, left a

quiet message for Lady Helen, and departed. But as he put her into a hansom her whole manner to him was full of a shy shrinking sweetness. And when Rose was shy and shrinking she was adorable.

Well, and now he had never again gone nearly so far as to kiss her hand, and yet because of an indiscreet moment everything was changed between them; she had turned resentful, stand-off, nay, as nearly rude as a girl under the restraints of modern manners can manage to be. He almost laughed as he recalled Helen's report of her interview with Rose that morning, in which she had tried to persuade a young person outrageously on her dignity to keep an engagement she had herself spontaneously made.

'I am very sorry, Lady Helen,' Rose had said, her slim figure drawn up so stiffly that the small Lady Helen felt herself totally effaced beside her. 'But I had rather not leave London this week. I think I will stay with mamma and Agnes.'

And nothing Lady Helen could say moved her, or modified her formula of refusal.

'What *have* you been doing, Hugh?' his sister asked him, half-dismayed, half-provoked.

Flaxman shrugged his shoulders and vowed he had been doing nothing. But, in truth, he knew very well that the day before he had overstepped the line. There had been a little scene between them, a quick passage of speech, a rash look and gesture on his part, which had been quite unpremeditated, but which had nevertheless transformed their relation. Rose had flushed up, had said a few incoherent words, which he had understood to be words of reproach, had left Lady

Helen's as quickly as possible, and next morning his Greenlaws party had fallen through.

'Check, certainly,' said Flaxman to himself ruefully, as he pondered these circumstances — 'not mate, I hope, if one can but find out how not to be a fool in future.'

And over his solitary fire he meditated far into the night.

Next day, at half-past seven in the evening, he entered Lady Charlotte's drawing-room, gayer, brisker, more alert than ever.

Rose started visibly at the sight of him, and shot a quick glance at the unblushing Lady Charlotte.

'I thought you were at Greenlaws,' she could not help saying to him, as she coldly offered him her hand. *Why* had Lady Charlotte never told her he was to escort them? Her irritation rose anew.

'What can one do,' he said lightly, 'if Elsmere will fix such a performance for Easter Eve? My party was at its last gasp too; it only wanted a telegram to Helen to give it its *coup de grâce.*'

Rose flushed up, but he turned on his heel at once, and began to banter his aunt on the housekeeper's bonnet and veil in which she had a little too obviously disguised herself.

And certainly, in the drive to the East End, Rose had no reason to complain of importunity on his part. Most of the way he was deep in talk with Lady Charlotte as to a certain loan exhibition in the East End, to which he and a good many of his friends were sending pictures; apparently his time and thought were entirely occupied with it. Rose, leaning back

silent in her corner, was presently seized with a little shock of surprise that there should be so many interests and relations in his life of which she knew nothing. He was talking now as the man of possessions and influence. She saw a glimpse of him as he was in his public aspect, and the kindness, the disinterestedness, the quiet sense, and the humour of his talk insensibly affected her as she sat listening. The mental image of him which had been dominant in her mind altered a little. Nay, she grew a little hot over it. She asked herself scornfully whether she were not as ready as any bread-and-butter miss of her acquaintance to imagine every man she knew in love with her.

Very likely he had meant what he said quite differently, and she — oh! humiliation — had flown into a passion with him for no reasonable cause. Supposing he *had* meant, two days ago, that if they were to go on being friends she must let him be her lover too, it would of course have been unpardonable. How *could* she let any one talk to her of love yet — especially Mr. Flaxman, who guessed, as she was quite sure, what had happened to her? He must despise her to have imagined it. His outburst had filled her with the oddest and most petulant resentment. Were all men self-seeking? Did all men think women shallow and fickle? Could a man and a woman never be honestly and simply friends? If he *had* made love to her, he could not possibly — and there was the sting of it — feel towards her maiden dignity that romantic respect which she herself cherished towards it. For it was incredible that any delicate-minded girl should go through such a crisis as she had gone through, and

then fall calmly into another lover's arms a few weeks later as though nothing had happened.

How we all attitudinise to ourselves! The whole of life often seems one long dramatic performance, in which one half of us is for ever posing to the other half.

But had he really made love to her? — had he meant what she had assumed him to mean? The girl lost herself in a torment of memory and conjecture, and meanwhile Mr. Flaxman sat opposite, talking away, and looking certainly as little love-sick as any man can well look. As the lamps flashed into the carriage her attention was often caught by his profile and finely-balanced head, by the hand lying on his knee, or the little gestures, full of life and freedom, with which he met some raid of Lady Charlotte's on his opinions, or opened a corresponding one on hers. There was certainly power in the man, a bright human sort of power, which inevitably attracted her. And that he was good too she had special grounds for knowing.

But what an aristocrat he was after all! What an over-prosperous exclusive set he belonged to! She lashed herself into anger as the other two chatted and sparred, with all these names of wealthy cousins and relations, with their parks and their pedigrees and their pictures! The aunt and nephew were debating how they could best bleed the family, in its various branches, of the art treasures belonging to it for the benefit of the East-Enders; therefore the names were inevitable. But Rose curled her delicate lip over them. And was it the best breeding, she wondered, to leave a third person so ostentatiously outside the conversation?

'Miss Leyburn, why are you coughing?' said Lady Charlotte suddenly.

'There is a great draught,' said Rose, shivering a little.

'So there is!' cried Lady Charlotte. 'Why, we have got both the windows open. Hugh, draw up Miss Leyburn's.'

He moved over to her and drew it up.

'I thought you liked a tornado,' he said to her, smiling. 'Will you have a shawl? — there is one behind me.'

'No, thank you,' she replied rather stiffly, and he was silent — retaining his place opposite to her, however.

'Have we reached Mr. Elsmere's part of the world yet?' asked Lady Charlotte, looking out.

'Yes, we are not far off — the river is to our right. We shall pass St. Wilfrid's soon.'

The coachman turned into a street where an open-air market was going on. The roadway and pavements were swarming; the carriage could barely pick its way through the masses of human beings. Flaming gas-jets threw it all into strong satanic light and shade. At the corner of a dingy alley Rose could see a fight going on; the begrimed ragged children, regardless of the April rain, swooped backwards and forwards under the very hoofs of the horses, or flattened their noses against the windows whenever the horses were forced into a walk.

The young girl-figure in grey, with the grey feathered hat, seemed specially to excite their notice. The glare of the street brought out the lines of the face, the gold of the hair. The Arabs outside made loutishly

flattering remarks once or twice, and Rose, colouring, drew back as far as she could into the carriage. Mr. Flaxman seemed not to hear; his aunt, with that obtrusive thirst for information which is so fashionable now among all women of position, was cross-questioning him as to the trades and population of the district, and he was drily responding. In reality his mind was full of a whirl of feeling, of a wild longing to break down a futile barrier and trample on a baffling resistance, to take that beautiful tameless creature in strong coercing arms, scold her, crush her, love her! Why does she make happiness so difficult? What right has she to hold devotion so cheap? He too grows angry. 'She was *not* in love with that spectral creature,' the inner self declares with energy — 'I will vow she never was. But she is like all the rest — a slave to the merest forms and trappings of sentiment. Because he *ought* to have loved her, and did n't, because she *fancied* she loved him, and did n't, my love is to be an offence to her! Monstrous — unjust!'

Suddenly they sped past St. Wilfrid's, resplendent with lights, the jewelled windows of the choir rising above the squalid walls and roofs into the rainy darkness, as the mystical chapel of the Graal, with its 'torches glimmering fair,' flashed out of the mountain storm and solitude on to Galahad's seeking eyes.

Rose bent forward involuntarily. 'What angel singing!' she said, dropping the window again to listen to the retreating sounds, her artist's eye kindling. 'Did you hear it? It was the last chorus in the St. Matthew Passion music.'

'I did not distinguish it,' he said — 'but their music is famous.'

His tone was distant; there was no friendliness in it. It would have been pleasant to her if he would have taken up her little remark and let bygones be bygones. But he showed no readiness to do so. The subject dropped, and presently he moved back to his former seat, and Lady Charlotte and he resumed their talk. Rose could not but see that his manner towards her was much changed. She herself had compelled it, but all the same she saw him leave her with a capricious little pang of regret, and afterwards the drive seemed to her more tedious and the dismal streets more dismal than before.

She tried to forget her companions altogether. Oh! what would Robert have to say? She was unhappy, restless. In her trouble lately it had often pleased her to go quite alone to strange churches, where for a moment the burden of the self had seemed lightened. But the old things were not always congenial to her, and there were modern ferments at work in her. No one of her family, unless it were Agnes, suspected what was going on. But in truth the rich crude nature had been touched at last, as Robert's had been long ago in Mr. Grey's lecture-room, by the piercing under-voices of things — the moral message of the world. 'What will he have to say?' she asked herself again feverishly, and as she looked across to Mr. Flaxman she felt a childish wish to be friends again with him, with everybody. Life was too difficult as it was, without quarrels and misunderstandings to make it worse.

## CHAPTER XL

A LONG street of warehouses — and at the end of it the horses slackened.

'I saw the president of the club yesterday,' said Flaxman, looking out. 'He is an old friend of mine — a most intelligent fanatic — met him on a Mansion House Fund committee last winter. He promised we should be looked after. But we shall only get back seats, and you'll have to put up with the smoking. They don't want ladies, and we shall only be there on sufferance.'

The carriage stopped. Mr. Flaxman guided his charges with some difficulty through the crowd about the steps, who inspected them and their vehicle with a frank and not over-friendly curiosity. At the door they found a man who had been sent to look for them, and were immediately taken possession of. He ushered them into the back of a large bare hall, glaringly lit, lined with white brick, and hung at intervals with political portraits and a few cheap engravings of famous men, Jesus of Nazareth taking his turn with Buddha, Socrates, Moses, Shakespeare, and Paul of Tarsus.

'Can't put you any forrarder, I'm afraid,' said their guide, with a shrug of the shoulders. 'The committee don't like strangers coming, and Mr. Collett, he got hauled over the coals for letting you in this evening.'

It was a new position for Lady Charlotte to be any-

where on sufferance. However, in the presence of three hundred smoking men, who might all of them be political assassins in disguise for anything she knew, she accepted her fate with meekness; and she and Rose settled themselves into their back seat under a rough sort of gallery, glad of their veils, and nearly blinded with the smoke.

The hall was nearly full, and Mr. Flaxman looked curiously round upon its occupants. The majority of them were clearly artisans — a spare, stooping, sharp-featured race. Here and there were a knot of stalwart dock labourers, strongly marked out in physique from the watchmakers and the potters, or an occasional seaman out of work, ship-steward, boatswain, or what not, generally bronzed, quick-eyed, and comely, save where the film of excess had already deadened colour and expression. Almost every one had a pot of beer before him, standing on long wooden flaps attached to the benches. The room was full of noise, coming apparently from the farther end, where some political bravo seemed to be provoking his neighbours. In their own vicinity the men scattered about were for the most part tugging silently at their pipes, alternately eyeing the clock and the new-comers.

There was a stir of feet round the door.

'There he is,' said Mr. Flaxman, craning round to see, and Robert entered.

He started as he saw them, flashed a smile to Rose, shook his head at Mr. Flaxman, and passed up the room.

'He looks pale and nervous,' said Lady Charlotte grimly, pouncing at once on the unpromising side of

things. 'If he breaks down are you prepared, Hugh, to play Elisha?'

Flaxman was far too much interested in the beginnings of the performance to answer.

Robert was standing forward on the platform, the chairman of the meeting at his side, members of the committee sitting behind on either hand. A good many men put down their pipes, and the hubbub of talk ceased. Others smoked on stolidly.

The chairman introduced the lecturer. The subject of the address would be, as they already knew, 'The Claim of Jesus upon Modern Life.' It was not very likely, he imagined, that Mr. Elsmere's opinions would square with those dominant in the club; but, whether or no, he claimed for him, as for everybody, a patient hearing, and the Englishman's privilege of fair play.

The speaker, a cabinet-maker dressed in a decent brown suit, spoke with fluency, and at the same time with that accent of moderation and *savoir faire* which some Englishmen in all classes have obviously inherited from centuries of government by discussion. Lady Charlotte, whose Liberalism was the mere varnish of an essentially aristocratic temper, was conscious of a certain dismay at the culture of the democracy as the man sat down. Mr. Flaxman, glancing to the right, saw a group of men standing, and amongst them a slight sharp-featured thread-paper of a man, with a taller companion, whom he identified as the pair he had noticed on the night of the story-telling. The little gasfitter was clearly all nervous fidget and expectation; the other, large and gaunt in figure, with a square impassive face, and close-shut lips that had

a perpetual mocking twist in the corners, stood beside him like some clumsy modern version, in a commoner clay, of Goethe's 'spirit that denies.'

Robert came forward with a roll of papers in his hand.

His first words were hardly audible. Rose felt her colour rising, Lady Charlotte glanced at her nephew, the standing group of men cried, 'Speak up!' The voice in the distance rose at once, braced by the touch of difficulty, and what it said came firmly down to them.

In after days Flaxman could not often be got to talk of the experience of this evening. When he did he would generally say, briefly, that as an *intellectual* effort he had never been inclined to rank this first public utterance very high among Elsmere's performances. The speaker's own emotion had stood somewhat in his way. A man argues better, perhaps, when he feels less.

'I have often heard him put his case, as I thought, more cogently in conversation,' Flaxman would say — though only to his most intimate friends — 'but what I never saw before or since was such an *effect of personality* as he produced that night. From that moment, at any rate, I loved him, and I understood his secret.'

Elsmere began with a few words of courteous thanks to the club for the hearing they had promised him.

Then he passed on to the occasion of his address — the vogue in the district of 'certain newspapers which, I understand, are specially relished and patronised by your association.'

And he laid down on a table beside him the copies of the *Freethinker* and of *Faith and Fools* which he had brought with him, and faced his audience again, his hands on his sides.

'Well! I am not here to-night to attack those newspapers. I want to reach your sympathies if I can in another way. If there is anybody here who takes pleasure in them, who thinks that such writing and such witticisms as he gets purveyed to him in these sheets do really help the cause of truth and intellectual freedom, I shall not attack his position from the front. I shall try to undermine it. I shall aim at rousing in him such a state of feeling as may suddenly convince him that what is injured by writing of this sort is not the orthodox Christian, or the Church, or Jesus of Nazareth, but always and inevitably the man who writes it and the man who loves it. His mind is possessed of an inflaming and hateful image, which drives him to mockery and violence. I want to replace it, if I can, by one of calm, of beauty and tenderness, which may drive him to humility and sympathy. And this, indeed, is the only way in which opinion is ever really altered — by the substitution of one mental picture for another.

'But in the first place,' resumed the speaker, after a moment's pause, changing his note a little, 'a word about myself. I am not here to-night quite in the position of the casual stranger, coming down to your district for the first time. As some of you know, I am endeavouring to make what is practically a settlement among you, asking you workingmen to teach me, if you will, what you have to teach as to the wants

and prospects of your order, and offering you in return whatever there is in me which may be worth your taking. Well, I imagine I should look at a man who preferred a claim of that sort with some closeness! You may well ask me for "antecedents," and I should like, if I may, to give them to you very shortly.

'Well, then, though I came down to this place under the wing of Mr. Edwardes' (some cheering) 'who is so greatly liked and respected here, I am not a Unitarian, nor am I an English Churchman. A year ago I was the vicar of an English country parish, where I should have been proud, so far as personal happiness went, to spend my life. Last autumn I left it and resigned my orders because I could no longer accept the creed of the English Church.' Unconsciously the thin dignified figure drew itself up, the voice took a certain dryness. All this was distasteful, but the orator's instinct was imperious.

As he spoke about a score of pipes which had till now been active in Flaxman's neighbourhood went down. The silence in the room became suddenly of a perceptibly different quality.

'Since then I have joined no other religious association. But it is not — God forbid! — because there is nothing left me to believe, but because in this transition England it is well for a man who has broken with the old things, to be very *patient*. No good can come of forcing opinion or agreement prematurely. A generation, nay, more, may have to spend itself in mere waiting and preparing for those new leaders and those new forms of corporate action which any great revolution of opinion, such as that we are now living

through, has always produced in the past, and will, we are justified in believing, produce again. But the hour and the men will come, and "they also serve who only stand and wait."'

Voice and look had kindled into fire. The consciousness of his audience was passing from him — the world of ideas was growing clearer.

'So much, then, for personalities of one sort. There are some of another, however, which I must touch upon for a moment. I am to speak to you to-night of the Jesus of history, but not only as an historian. History is good, but religion is better — and if Jesus of Nazareth concerned me, and, in my belief, concerned you, only as an historical figure, I should not be here to-night.

'But if I am to talk religion to you, and I have begun by telling you I am not this and not that, it seems to me that for mere clearness' sake, for the sake of that round and whole image of thought which I want to present to you, you must let me run through a preliminary confession of faith — as short and simple as I can make it. You must let me describe certain views of the universe and of man's place in it, which make the framework, as it were, into which I shall ask you to fit the picture of Jesus which will come after.'

Robert stood a moment considering. An instant's nervousness, a momentary sign of self-consciousness, would have broken the spell and set the room against him. He showed neither.

'My friends,' he said at last, speaking to the crowded benches of London workmen with the same simplicity he would have used towards his boys at Murewell.

'the man who is addressing you to-night believes in *God;* and in *Conscience,* which is God's witness in the soul; and in *Experience,* which is at once the record and the instrument of man's education at God's hands. He places his whole trust, for life and death, "*in God the Father Almighty,*" — in that force at the root of things which is revealed to us whenever a man helps his neighbour, or a mother denies herself for her child; whenever a soldier dies without a murmur for his country, or a sailor puts out in the darkness to rescue the perishing; whenever a workman throws mind and conscience into his work, or a statesman labours not for his own gain but for that of the State! He believes in an Eternal Goodness — and an Eternal Mind — of which Nature and Man are the continuous and the only revelation. . . .'

The room grew absolutely still. And into the silence there fell, one by one, the short terse sentences, in which the seer, the believer, struggled to express what God has been, is, and will ever be to the soul which trusts Him. In them the whole effort of the speaker was really to restrain, to moderate, to depersonalise the voice of faith. But the intensity of each word burnt it into the hearer as it was spoken. Even Lady Charlotte turned a little pale — the tears stood in her eyes.

Then, from the witness of God in the soul, and in the history of man's moral life, Elsmere turned to the glorification of *Experience,* 'of that unvarying and rational order of the world which has been the appointed instrument of man's training since life and thought began.'

'*There*,' he said slowly, 'in the unbroken sequences of Nature, in the physical history of the world, in the long history of man, physical, intellectual, moral — *there* lies the revelation of God. There is no other, my friends!'

Then, while the room hung on his words, he entered on a brief exposition of the text, '*Miracles do not happen*,' restating Hume's old argument, and adding to it some of the most cogent of those modern arguments drawn from literature, from history, from the comparative study of religions and religious evidence, which were not practically at Hume's disposal, but which are now affecting the popular mind as Hume's reasoning could never have affected it.

'We are now able to show how miracle, or the belief in it, which is the same thing, comes into being. The study of miracle in all nations, and under all conditions, yields everywhere the same results. Miracle may be the child of imagination, of love, nay, of a passionate sincerity, but invariably it lives with ignorance and is withered by knowledge!'

And then, with lightning unexpectedness, he turned upon his audience, as though the ardent soul reacted at once against a strain of mere negation.

'But do not let yourselves imagine for an instant that, because in a rational view of history there is no place for a Resurrection and Ascension, therefore you may profitably allow yourself a mean and miserable mirth of *this* sort over the past!' — and his outstretched hand struck the newspapers beside him with passion. 'Do not imagine for an instant that what is binding, adorable, beautiful in that past is done away

with when miracle is given up. No, thank God! We still "live by admiration, hope, and love." God only draws closer, great men become greater, human life more wonderful as miracle disappears. Woe to you if you cannot see it! — it is the testing truth of our day.

'And besides — do you suppose that mere violence, mere invective, and savage mockery ever accomplished anything — nay, what is more to the point, ever *destroyed* anything in human history? No — an idea cannot be killed from without — it can only be supplanted, transformed, by another idea, and that one of equal virtue and magic. Strange paradox! In the moral world you cannot pull down except by gentleness — you cannot revolutionise except by sympathy. Jesus only superseded Judaism by absorbing and recreating all that was best in it. There are no inexplicable gaps and breaks in the story of humanity. The religion of to-day, with all its faults and mistakes, will go on unshaken so long as there is nothing else of equal loveliness and potency to put in its place. The Jesus of the churches will remain paramount so long as the man of to-day imagines himself dispensed by any increase of knowledge from loving the Jesus of history.

'But *why?* you will ask me. What does the Jesus of history matter to me?'

And so he was brought to the place of great men in the development of mankind — to the part played in the human story by those lives in which men have seen all their noblest thoughts of God, of duty, and of law embodied, realised before them with a shining and incomparable beauty.

'. . . You think — because it is becoming plain to the modern eye that the ignorant love of his first followers wreathed his life in legend — that therefore you can escape from Jesus of Nazareth, you can put him aside as though he had never been? Folly! Do what you will, you cannot escape him. His life and death underlie our institutions as the alphabet underlies our literature. Just as the lives of Buddha and of Mohammed are wrought ineffaceably into the civilisation of Africa and Asia, so the life of Jesus is wrought ineffaceably into the higher civilisation, the nobler social conceptions of Europe. It is wrought into your being and into mine. We are what we are to-night, as Englishmen and as citizens, largely because a Galilean peasant was born and grew to manhood, and preached, and loved, and died. And you think that a fact so tremendous can be just scoffed away — that we can get rid of it, and of our share in it, by a ribald paragraph and a caricature!

'No. Your hatred and your ridicule are powerless. And thank God they are powerless. There is no wanton waste in the moral world, any more than in the material. There is only fruitful change and beneficent transformation. Granted that the true story of Jesus of Nazareth was from the beginning obscured by error and mistake; granted that those errors and mistakes which were once the strength of Christianity are now its weakness, and by the slow march and sentence of time are now threatening, unless we can clear them away, to lessen the hold of Jesus on the love and remembrance of man. What then? The fact is merely a call to you and me, who recognise it, to go back to

the roots of things, to reconceive the Christ, to bring him afresh into our lives, to make the life so freely given for man minister again in new ways to man's new needs. Every great religion is, in truth, a concentration of great ideas, capable, as all ideas are, of infinite expansion and adaptation. And woe to our human weakness if it loose its hold one instant before it must on any of those rare and precious possessions which have helped it in the past, and may again inspire it in the future!

'*To reconceive the Christ!* It is the special task of our age, though in some sort and degree it has been the ever-recurring task of Europe since the beginning.'

He paused, and then very simply, and so as to be understood by those who heard him, he gave a rapid sketch of that great operation worked by the best intellect of Europe during the last half-century — broadly speaking — on the facts and documents of primitive Christianity. From all sides and by the help of every conceivable instrument those facts have been investigated, and now at last the great result — 'the revivified reconceived truth' — seems ready to emerge. Much may still be known — much can never be known; but if we will, we may now discern the true features of Jesus of Nazareth, as no generation but our own has been able to discern them, since those who had seen and handled passed away.

'Let me try, however feebly, and draw it afresh for you, that life of lives, that story of stories, as the labour of our own age in particular has patiently revealed it to us. Come back with me through the centuries; let us try and see the Christ of Galilee and the

Christ of Jerusalem as he was, before a credulous love and Jewish tradition and Greek subtlety had at once dimmed and glorified the truth. Ah! do what we will, it is so scanty and poor, this knowledge of ours, compared with all that we yearn to know — but, such as it is, let me, very humbly and very tentatively, endeavour to put it before you.'

At this point Flaxman's attention was suddenly distracted by a stir round the door of entrance on his left hand. Looking round, he saw a Ritualist priest, in cassock and cloak, disputing in hurried undertones with the men about the door. At last he gained his point apparently, for the men, with half-angry, half-quizzing looks at each other, allowed him to come in, and he found a seat. Flaxman was greatly struck by the face — by its ascetic beauty, the stern and yet delicate whiteness and emaciation of it. He sat with both hands resting on the stick he held in front of him, intently listening, the perspiration of physical weakness on his brow and round his finely curved mouth. Clearly he could hardly see the lecturer, for the room had become inconveniently crowded, and the men about him were mostly standing.

'One of the St. Wilfrid's priests, I suppose,' Flaxman said to himself. 'What on earth is he doing *dans cette galère?* Are we to have a disputation? That would be dramatic.'

He had no attention, however, to spare, and the intruder was promptly forgotten. When he turned back to the platform he found that Robert, with Mackay's help, had hung on a screen to his right,

four or five large drawings of Nazareth, of the Lake of Gennesaret, of Jerusalem, and the Temple of Herod, of the ruins of that synagogue on the probable site of Capernaum in which conceivably Jesus may have stood. They were bold and striking, and filled the bare hall at once with suggestions of the East. He had used them often at Murewell. Then, adopting a somewhat different tone, he plunged into the life of Jesus. He brought to it all his trained historical power, all his story-telling faculty, all his sympathy with the needs of feeling. And bit by bit, as the quick nervous sentences issued and struck, each like the touch of a chisel, the majestic figure emerged, set against its natural background, instinct with some fraction at least of the magic of reality, most human, most persuasive, most tragic. He brought out the great words of the new faith, to which, whatever may be their literal origin, Jesus, and Jesus only, gave currency and immortal force. He dwelt on the magic, the permanence, the expansiveness, of the young Nazarene's central conception — the spiritualised, universalised 'Kingdom of God.' Elsmere's thought, indeed, knew nothing of a perfect man, as it knew nothing of an incarnate God; he shrank from nothing that he believed true; but every limitation, every reserve he allowed himself, did but make the whole more poignantly real, and the claim of Jesus more penetrating.

'The world has grown since Jesus preached in Galilee and Judæa. We cannot learn the *whole* of God's lesson from him now — nay, we could not then! But all that is most essential to man — all that saves the soul, all that purifies the heart — that he has still for

you and me, as he had it for the men and women of his own time.'

Then he came to the last scenes. His voice sank a little; his notes dropped from his hand; and the silence grew oppressive. The dramatic force, the tender passionate insight, the fearless modernness with which the story was told, made it almost unbearable. Those listening saw the trial, the streets of Jerusalem, that desolate place outside the northern gate; they were spectators of the torture, they heard the last cry. No one present had ever so seen, so heard before. Rose had hidden her face. Flaxman for the first time forgot to watch the audience; the men had forgotten each other; and for the first time that night, in many a cold embittered heart, there was born that love of the Son of Man which Nathaniel felt, and John, and Mary of Bethany, and which has in it now, as then, the promise of the future.

' "*He laid him in a tomb which had been hewn out of a rock, and he rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.*" The ashes of Jesus of Nazareth mingled with the earth of Palestine —

> ' "Far hence he lies
> In the lorn Syrian town,
> And on his grave, with shining eyes,
> The Syrian stars look down." '

He stopped. The melancholy cadence of the verse died away. Then a gleam broke over the pale exhausted face — a gleam of extraordinary sweetness.

'And in the days and weeks that followed the devout and passionate fancy of a few mourning Galileans begat the exquisite fable of the Resurrection. How

natural — and amid all its falseness, how true — is that naïve and contradictory story! The rapidity with which it spread is a measure of many things. It is, above all, a measure of the greatness of Jesus, of the force with which he had drawn to himself the hearts and imaginations of men. . . .

'And now, my friends, what of all this? If these things I have been saying to you are true, what is the upshot of them for you and me? Simply this, as I conceive it — that instead of wasting your time, and degrading your souls, by indulgence in such grime as this' — and he pointed to the newspapers — 'it is your urgent business and mine — at this moment — to do our very *utmost* to bring this life of Jesus, our precious invaluable possession as a people, back into some real and cogent relation with our modern lives and beliefs and hopes. Do not answer me that such an effort is a mere dream and futility, conceived in the vague, apart from reality — that men must have something to worship, and that if they cannot worship Jesus, they will not trouble to love him. Is the world desolate with God still in it, and does it rest merely with us to love or not to love? Love and revere *something* we must, if we are to be men and not beasts. At all times and in all nations, as I have tried to show you, man has helped himself by the constant and passionate memory of those great ones of his race who have spoken to him most audibly of God and of eternal hope. And for us Europeans and Englishmen, as I have also tried to show you, history and inheritance have decided. If we turn away from the true Jesus of Nazareth because he has been disfigured and misrepresented

by the Churches, we turn away from that in which our weak wills and desponding souls are meant to find their most obvious and natural help and inspiration — from that symbol of the Divine, which, of necessity, means most to *us*. No! give him back your hearts — be ashamed that you have ever forgotten your debt to him! Let combination and brotherhood do for the newer and simpler faith what they did once for the old — let them give it a practical shape, a practical grip on human life. . . . Then we too shall have our Easter — we too shall have the right to say, *He is not here, he is risen.* Not here — in legend, in miracle, in the beautiful outworn forms and crystallisations of older thought. *He is risen* — in a wiser reverence and a more reasonable love; risen in new forms of social help inspired by his memory, called afresh by his name! Risen — if you and your children will it — in a church or company of the faithful, over the gates of which two sayings of man's past, into which man's present has breathed new meanings, shall be written: —

*'"In Thee, O Eternal, have I put my trust":*

and —

*'"This do in remembrance of Me."'*

The rest was soon over. The audience woke from the trance in which it had been held with a sudden burst of talk and movement. In the midst of it, and as the majority of the audience were filing out into the adjoining rooms, the gasfitter's tall companion Andrews mounted the platform, while the gasfitter

himself, with an impatient shrug, pushed his way into the outgoing crowd. Andrews went slowly and deliberately to work, dealing out his long cantankerous sentences with a nasal *sang-froid* which seemed to change in a moment the whole aspect and temperature of things. He remarked that Mr. Elsmere had talked of what great scholars had done to clear up this matter of Christ and Christianity. Well, he was free to maintain that old Tom Paine was as good a scholar as any of 'em, and most of them in that hall knew what *he* thought about it. Tom Paine had n't anything to say against Jesus Christ, and he had n't. He was a workman and a fine sort of man, and if he'd been alive now he'd have been a Socialist, 'as most of us are,' and he'd have made it hot for the rich loafers, and the sweaters, and the middlemen, 'as we'd like to make it hot for 'em.' But as for those people who got up the Church — Mythologists Tom Paine called 'em — and the miracles, and made an uncommonly good thing out of it, pecuniarily speaking, he did n't see what they'd got to do with keeping up, or mending, or preserving *their* precious bit of work. The world had found 'em out, and serve 'em right.

And he wound up with a fierce denunciation of priests, not without a harsh savour and eloquence, which was much clapped by the small knot of workmen amongst whom he had been standing.

Then there followed a Socialist — an eager, ugly, black-bearded little fellow, who preached the absolute necessity of doing without 'any cultus whatsoever,' threw scorn on both the Christians and the Positivists for refusing so to deny themselves, and appealed

earnestly to his group of hearers 'to help in bringing religion back from heaven to earth, where it belongs.' Mr. Elsmere's new church, if he ever got it, would only be a fresh instrument in the hands of the *bourgeoisie*. And when the people had got their rights and brought down the capitalists, they were not going to be such fools as to put their necks under the heel of what were called 'the educated classes.' The people who wrote the newspapers Mr. Elsmere objected to, knew quite enough for the workingman — and people should not be too smooth-spoken; what the working class wanted beyond everything just now was *grit*.

A few other short speeches followed, mostly of the common Secularist type, in defence of the newspapers attacked. But the defence, on the whole, was shuffling and curiously half-hearted. Robert, sitting by with his head on his hand, felt that there, at any rate, his onslaught had told.

He said a few words in reply, in a low husky voice, without a trace of his former passion, and the meeting broke up. The room had quickly filled when it was known that he was up again; and as he descended the steps of the platform, after shaking hands with the chairman, the hundreds present broke into a sudden burst of cheering. Lady Charlotte pressed forward to him through the crowd, offering to take him home. 'Come with us, Mr. Elsmere; you look like a ghost.' But he shook his head, smiling. 'No, thank you, Lady Charlotte — I must have some air,' and he took her out on his arm, while Flaxman followed with Rose.

It once occurred to Flaxman to look round for the priest he had seen come in. But there were no signs

of him. 'I had an idea he would have spoken,' he thought. 'Just as well, perhaps. We should have had a row.'

Lady Charlotte threw herself back in the carriage as they drove off, with a long breath, and the inward reflexion, 'So his wife would n't come and hear him! Must be a woman with a character that — a Strafford in petticoats!'

Robert turned up the street to the City, the tall slight figure seeming to shrink together as he walked. After his passionate effort, indescribable depression had overtaken him.

'Words — words!' he said to himself, striking out his hands in a kind of feverish protest, as he strode along, against his own powerlessness, against that weight of the present and the actual which seems to the enthusiast alternately light as air, or heavy as the mass of Ætna on the breast of Enceladus.

Suddenly, at the corner of a street, a man's figure in a long black robe stopped him and laid a hand on his arm.

'Newcome!' cried Robert, standing still.

'I was there,' said the other, bending forward and looking close into his eyes. 'I heard almost all. I went to confront, to denounce you!'

By the light of a lamp not far off Robert caught the attenuated whiteness and sharpness of the well-known face, to which weeks of fasting and mystical excitement had given a kind of unearthly remoteness. He gathered himself together with an inward groan. He felt as though there were no force in him at that moment wherewith to meet reproaches, to beat down

fanaticism. The pressure on nerve and strength seemed unbearable.

Newcome, watching him with eagle eye, saw the sudden shrinking and hesitation. He had often in old days felt the same sense of power over the man who yet, in what seemed his weakness, had always escaped him in the end.

'I went to denounce,' he continued, in a strange tense voice, 'and the Lord refused it to me. He kept me watching for you here. These words are not mine I speak. I waited patiently in that room till the Lord should deliver His enemy into my hand. My wrath was hot against the deserter that could not even desert in silence — hot against his dupes. Then suddenly words came to me — they have come to me before, they burn up the very heart and marrow in me — "*Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, and the Lord commandeth it not?*" There they were in my ears, written on the walls — the air —'

The hand dropped from Robert's arm. A dull look of defeat, of regret, darkened the gleaming eyes. They were standing in a quiet deserted street, but through a side opening the lights, the noise, the turbulence of the open-air market came drifting to them through the rainy atmosphere which blurred and magnified everything.

'Aye, after days and nights in His most blessed sanctuary,' Newcome resumed slowly, 'I came by His commission, as I thought, to fight His battle with a traitor! And at the last moment His strength, which was in me, went from me. I sat there dumb; His hand was heavy upon me. His will be done!'

The voice sank; the priest drew his thin shaking hand across his eyes, as though the awe of a mysterious struggle were still upon him. Then he turned again to Elsmere, his face softening, radiating.

'Elsmere, take the sign, the message! I thought it was given to me to declare the Lord's wrath. Instead, He sends you once more by me, even now — even fresh from this new defiance of His mercy, the tender offer of His grace! He lies at rest to-night, my brother' —what sweetness in the low vibrating tones! —'after all the anguish. Let me draw you down on your knees beside Him. It is you, you, who have helped to drive in the nails, to embitter the agony! It is you who in His loneliness have been robbing Him of the souls that should be His! It is you who have been doing your utmost to make His Cross and Passion of no effect. Oh, let it break your heart to think of it! Watch by Him to-night, my friend, my brother, and to-morrow let the risen Lord reclaim His own!'

Never had Robert seen any mortal face so persuasively beautiful; never surely did saint or ascetic plead with a more penetrating gentleness. After the storm of those opening words the change was magical. The tears stood in Elsmere's eyes. But his quick insight, in spite of himself, divined the subtle natural facts behind the outburst, the strained physical state, the irritable brain — all the consequences of a long defiance of physical and mental law. The priest repelled him, the man drew him like a magnet.

'What can I say to you, Newcome?' he cried despairingly. 'Let me say nothing, dear old friend! I am tired out; so, I expect, are you. I know what this

week has been to you. Walk with me a little. Leave these great things alone. We cannot agree. Be content — God knows! Tell me about the old place and the people. I long for news of them.'

A sort of shudder passed through his companion. Newcome stood wrestling with himself. It was like the slow departure of a possessing force. Then he sombrely assented, and they turned towards the City. But his answers, as Robert questioned him, were sharp and mechanical, and presently it became evident that the demands of the ordinary talk to which Elsmere rigorously held him were more than he could bear.

As they reached St. Paul's, towering into the watery moonlight of the clouded sky, he stopped abruptly and said good-night.

'You came to me in the spirit of war,' said Robert, with some emotion, as he held his hand; 'give me instead the grasp of peace!'

The spell of his manner, his presence, prevailed at last. A melancholy quivering smile dawned on the priest's delicate lip.

'God bless you — God restore you!' he said sadly, and was gone.

## CHAPTER XLI

A WEEK later Elsmere was startled to find himself detained, after his story-telling, by a trio of workmen, asking on behalf of some thirty or forty members of the North R—— Club that he would give them a course of lectures on the New Testament. One of them was the gasfitter Charles Richards; another was the watchmaker Lestrange, who had originally challenged Robert to deliver himself; and the third was a tough old Scotchman of sixty with a philosophical turn, under whose spoutings of Hume and Locke, of Reid and Dugald Stewart, delivered in the shrillest of cracked voices, the club had writhed many an impatient half-hour on debating nights. He had an unexpected artistic gift, a kind of 'sport' as compared with the rest of his character, which made him a valued designer in the pottery works; but his real interests were speculative and argumentative, concerned with 'common nawtions and the praimary elements of reason,' and the appearance of Robert in the district seemed to offer him at last a foeman worthy of his steel. Elsmere shrewdly suspected that the last two looked forward to any teaching he might give mostly as a new and favourable exercising ground for their own wits; but he took the risk, gladly accepted the invitation, and fixed Sunday afternoons for a weekly New Testament lecture.

His first lecture, which he prepared with great care,

was delivered to thirty-seven men a fortnight later. It was on the political and social state of Palestine and the East at the time of Christ's birth; and Robert, who was as fervent a believer in 'large maps' as Lord Salisbury, had prepared a goodly store of them for the occasion, together with a number of drawings and photographs which formed part of the collection he had been gradually making since his own visit to the Holy Land. There was nothing he laid more stress on than these helps to the eye and imagination in dealing with the Bible. He was accustomed to maintain in his arguments with Hugh Flaxman that the orthodox traditional teaching of Christianity would become impossible as soon as it should be the habit to make a free and modern use of history and geography and social material in connexion with the Gospels. Nothing tends so much, he would say, to break down the irrational barrier which men have raised about this particular tract of historical space, nothing helps so much to let in the light and air of scientific thought upon it, and therefore nothing prepares the way so effectively for a series of new conceptions.

By a kind of natural selection Richards became Elsmere's chief helper and adjutant in the Sunday lectures, — with regard to all such matters as beating up recruits, keeping guard over portfolios, handing round maps and photographs, etc., — supplanting in this function the jealous and sensitive Mackay, who, after his original opposition, had now arrived at regarding Robert as his own particular property, and the lecturer's quick smile of thanks for services rendered as his own especial right. The bright, quick-

silvery, irascible little workman, however, was irresistible and had his way. He had taken a passion for Robert as for a being of another order and another world. In the discussions which generally followed the lecture he showed a receptiveness, an intelligence, which were in reality a matter not of the mind but of the heart. He loved, therefore he understood. At the club he stood for Elsmere with a quivering spasmodic eloquence, as against Andrews and the Secularists. One thing only puzzled Robert. Among all the little fellow's sallies and indiscretions, which were not infrequent, no reference to his home life was ever included. Here he kept even Robert absolutely at arm's length. Robert knew that he was married and had children, nothing more.

The old Scotchman, Macdonald, came out after the first lecture somewhat crestfallen.

'Not the sort of stooff I'd expected!' he said, with a shade of perplexity on the rugged face. 'He doos n't talk eneuf in the *aa*bstract for me.'

But he went again, and the second lecture, on the origin of the Gospels, got hold of him, especially as it supplied him with a whole armoury of new arguments in support of Hume's doctrine of conscience, and in defiance of 'that blatin' creetur, Reid.' The thesis with which Robert, drawing on some of the stores supplied him by the squire's book, began his account — *i.e.*, the gradual growth within the limits of history of man's capacity for telling the exact truth — fitted in, to the Scotchman's thinking, so providentially with his own favourite experimental doctrines as against the 'intueetion' folks, 'who will have it that a babby's

got as moch mind as Mr. Gladstone, ef it only knew it!' that afterwards he never missed a lecture.

Lestrange was more difficult. He had the inherited temperament of the Genevese *frondeur*, which made Geneva the headquarters of Calvinism in the sixteenth century, and bids fair to make her the headquarters of Continental Radicalism in the nineteenth. Robert never felt his wits so much stretched and sharpened as when after the lecture Lestrange was putting questions and objections with an acrid subtlety and persistence worthy of a descendant of that burgher class which first built up the Calvinistic system and then produced the destroyer of it in Rousseau. Robert bore his heckling, however, with great patience and adroitness. He had need of all he knew, as Murray Edwardes had warned him. But luckily he knew a great deal; his thought was clearing and settling month by month, and whatever he may have lost at any moment by the turn of an argument, he recovered immediately afterwards by the force of personality, and of a single-mindedness in which there was never a trace of personal grasping.

Week by week the lecture became more absorbing to him, the men more pliant, his hold on them firmer. His disinterestedness, his brightness and resource, perhaps, too, the signs about him of a light and frail physical organisation, the novelty of his position, the inventiveness of his method, gave him little by little an immense power in the place. After the first two lectures Murray Edwardes became his constant and enthusiastic hearer on Sunday afternoons, and, catching some of Robert's ways and spirit, he gradually

brought his own chapel and teaching more and more into line with the Elgood Street undertaking. So that the venture of the two men began to take ever larger proportions; and, kindled by the growing interest and feeling about him, dreams began to rise in Elsmere's mind which as yet he hardly dared to cherish; which came and went, however, weaving a substance for themselves out of each successive incident and effort.

Meanwhile he was at work on an average three evenings in the week besides the Sunday. In West End drawing-rooms his personal gift had begun to tell no less than in this crowded, squalid East; and as his aims became known, other men, finding the thoughts of their own hearts revealed in him, or touched with that social compunction which is one of the notes of our time, came down and became his helpers. Of all the social projects of which that Elgood Street room became the centre, Elsmere was, in some sense, the life and inspiration. But it was not these projects themselves which made this period of his life remarkable. London at the present moment, if it be honeycombed with vice and misery, is also honeycombed with the labour of an ever-expanding charity. Week by week men and women of like gifts and energies with Elsmere spend themselves, as he did, in the constant effort to serve and to alleviate. What *was* noticeable, what *was* remarkable in this work of his, was the spirit, the religious passion which, radiating from him, began after a while to kindle the whole body of men about him. It was from his Sunday lectures and his talks with the children, boys and girls, who came in after the lecture to spend a happy

hour and a half with him on Sunday afternoons, that in later years hundreds of men and women will date the beginnings of a new absorbing life. There came a time, indeed, when, instead of meeting criticism by argument, Robert was able simply to point to accomplished facts. 'You ask me,' he would say in effect, 'to prove to you that men can love, can make a new and fruitful use, for daily life and conduct, of a merely human Christ. Go amongst our men, talk to our children, and satisfy yourself. A little while ago scores of these men either hated the very name of Christianity or were entirely indifferent to it. To scores of them now the name of the teacher of Nazareth, the victim of Jerusalem, is dear and sacred; his life, his death, his words, are becoming once more a constant source of moral effort and spiritual hope. See for yourself!'

However, we are anticipating. Let us go back to May.

One beautiful morning Robert was sitting working in his study, his windows open to the breezy blue sky and the budding plane-trees outside, when the door was thrown open and 'Mr. Wendover' was announced.

The squire entered; but what a shrunken and aged squire! The gait was feeble, the bearing had lost all its old erectness, the bronzed strength of the face had given place to a waxen and ominous pallor. Robert, springing up with joy to meet the great gust of Murewell air which seemed to blow about him with the mention of the squire's name, was struck, arrested. He guided his guest to a chair with an almost filial carefulness.

'I don't believe, Squire,' he exclaimed, 'you ought to be doing this — wandering about London by yourself!'

But the squire, as silent and angular as ever when anything personal to himself was concerned, would take no notice of the implied anxiety and sympathy. He grasped his umbrella between his knees with a pair of brown twisted hands, and, sitting very upright, looked critically round the room. Robert, studying the dwindled figure, remembered with a pang the saying of another Oxford scholar, *à propos* of the death of a young man of extraordinary promise, '*What learning has perished with him! How vain seems all toil to acquire!*' — and the words, as they passed through his mind, seemed to him to ring another death-knell.

But after the first painful impression he could not help losing himself in the pleasure of the familiar face, the Murewell associations.

'How is the village, and the Institute? And what sort of man is my successor — the man, I mean, who came after Armitstead?'

'I had him once to dinner,' said the squire briefly; 'he made a false quantity, and asked me to subscribe to the Church Missionary Society. I have n't seen him since. He and the village have been at loggerheads about the Institute, I believe. He wanted to turn out the Dissenters. Bateson came to me, and we circumvented him, of course. But the man's an ass. Don't talk of him!'

Robert sighed a long sigh. Was all his work undone? It wrung his heart to remember the opening of the Institute, the ardour of his boys. He asked a few

questions about individuals, but soon gave it up as hopeless. The squire neither knew nor cared.

'And Mrs. Darcy?'

'My sister had tea in her thirtieth summer-house last Sunday,' remarked the squire grimly. 'She wished me to communicate the fact to you and Mrs. Elsmere. Also, that the worst novel of the century will be out in a fortnight, and she trusts to you to see it well reviewed in all the leading journals.'

Robert laughed, but it was not very easy to laugh. There was a sort of ghastly undercurrent in the squire's sarcasms that effectually deprived them of anything mirthful.

'And your book?'

'Is in abeyance. I shall bequeath you the manuscript in my will, to do what you like with.'

'Squire!'

'Quite true! If you had stayed, I should have finished it, I suppose. But after a certain age the toil of spinning cobwebs entirely out of his own brain becomes too much for a man.'

It was the first thing of the sort that iron mouth had ever said to him. Elsmere was painfully touched.

'You must not — you shall not give it up,' he urged. 'Publish the first part alone, and ask me for any help you please.'

The squire shook his head.

'Let it be. Your paper in the *Nineteenth Century* showed me that the best thing I can do is to hand on my materials to you. Though I am not sure that when you have got them you will make the best use of them. You and Grey between you call yourselves

Liberals, and imagine yourselves reformers, and all the while you are doing nothing but playing into the hands of the Blacks. All this theistic philosophy of yours only means so much grist to their mill in the end.'

'They don't see it in that light themselves,' said Robert, smiling.

'No,' returned the squire, 'because most men are puzzle-heads. Why,' he added, looking darkly at Robert, while the great head fell forward on his breast in the familiar Murewell attitude, 'why can't you do your work and let the preaching alone?'

'Because,' said Robert, 'the preaching seems to me my work. There is the great difference between us, Squire. You look upon knowledge as an end in itself. It may be so. But to me knowledge has always been valuable first and foremost for its bearing on life.'

'Fatal twist that,' returned the squire harshly. 'Yes, I know; it was always in you. Well, are you happy? does this new crusade of yours give you pleasure?'

'Happiness,' replied Robert, leaning against the chimneypiece and speaking in a low voice, 'is always relative. No one knows it better than you. Life is full of oppositions. But the work takes my whole heart and all my energies.'

The squire looked at him in disapproving silence for a while.

'You will bury your life in it miserably,' he said at last; 'it will be a toil of Sisyphus leaving no trace behind it; whereas such a book as you might write if you gave your life to it, might live and work, and harry the enemy when you are gone.'

Robert forbore the natural retort.

The squire went round his library, making remarks, with all the caustic shrewdness natural to him, on the new volumes that Robert had acquired since their walks and talks together.

'The Germans,' he said at last, putting back a book into the shelves with a new accent of distaste and weariness, 'are beginning to founder in the sea of their own learning. Sometimes I think I will read no more German. It is a nation of learned fools, none of whom ever sees an inch beyond his own professorial nose.'

Then he stayed to luncheon, and Catherine, moved by many feelings — perhaps in subtle striving against her own passionate sense of wrong at this man's hands — was kind to him, and talked and smiled, indeed, so much that the squire for the first time in his life took individual notice of her, and as he parted with Elsmere in the hall made the remark that Mrs. Elsmere seemed to like London, to which Robert, busy in an opportune search for his guest's coat, made no reply.

'When are you coming to Murewell?' the squire said to him abruptly, as he stood at the door muffled up as though it were December. 'There are a good many points in that last article you want talking to about. Come next month with Mrs. Elsmere.'

Robert drew a long breath, inspired by many feelings.

'I will come, but not yet. I must get broken in here more thoroughly first. Murewell touches me too deeply, and my wife. You are going abroad in the summer, you say. Let me come to you in the autumn.'

The squire said nothing, and went his way, leaning heavily on his stick, across the square. Robert felt himself a brute to let him go, and almost ran after him.

That evening Robert was disquieted by the receipt of a note from a young fellow of St. Anselm's, an intimate friend and occasional secretary of Grey. Grey, the writer said, had received Robert's last letter, was deeply interested in his account of his work, and begged him to write again. He would have written, but that he was himself in the doctor's hands, suffering from various ills, probably connected with an attack of malarial fever which had befallen him in Rome the year before.

Catherine found him poring over the letter, and, as it seemed to her, oppressed by an anxiety out of all proportion to the news itself.

'They are not really troubled, I think,' she said, kneeling down beside him, and laying her cheek against his. 'He will soon get over it, Robert.'

But, alas! this mood, the tender characteristic mood of the old Catherine, was becoming rarer and rarer with her. As the spring expanded, as the sun and the leaves came back, poor Catherine's temper had only grown more wintry and more rigid. Her life was full of moments of acute suffering. Never, for instance, did she forget the evening of Robert's lecture to the club. All the time he was away she had sat brooding by herself in the drawing-room, divining with a bitter clairvoyance all that scene in which he was taking part, her being shaken with a tempest of misery and repulsion. And together with that torturing image of a glaring room in which her husband, once Christ's

loyal minister, was employing all his powers of mind and speech to make it easier for ignorant men to desert and fight against the Lord who bought them, there mingled a hundred memories of her father which were now her constant companions. In proportion as Robert and she became more divided, her dead father resumed a ghostly hold upon her. There were days when she went about rigid and silent, in reality living altogether in the past, among the grey farms, the crags, and the stony ways of the mountains.

At such times her mind would be full of pictures of her father's ministrations — his talks with the shepherds on the hills, with the women at their doors, his pale dreamer's face beside some wild deathbed, shining with the Divine message, the "visions" which to her awestruck childish sense would often seem to hold him in their silent walks among the misty hills.

Robert, taught by many small indications, came to recognise these states of feeling in her with a dismal clearness, and to shrink more and more sensitively while they lasted from any collision with her. He kept his work, his friends, his engagements to himself, talking resolutely of other things, she trying to do the same, but with less success, as her nature was less pliant than his.

Then there would come moments when the inward preoccupation would give way, and that strong need of loving, which was, after all, the basis of Catherine's character, would break hungrily through, and the wife of their early married days would reappear, though still only with limitations. A certain nervous physical dread of any approach to a particular range of subjects

with her husband was always present in her. Nay, through all these months it gradually increased in morbid strength. Shock had produced it; perhaps shock alone could loosen the stifling pressure of it. But still every now and then her mood was brighter, more caressing, and the area of common mundane interests seemed suddenly to broaden for them.

Robert did not always make a wise use of these happier times; he was incessantly possessed with his old idea that if she only *would* allow herself some very ordinary intercourse with his world, her mood would become less strained, his occupations and his friends would cease to be such bugbears to her, and, for his comfort and hers, she might ultimately be able to sympathise with certain sides at any rate of his work.

So again and again, when her manner no longer threw him back on himself, he made efforts and experiments. But he managed them far less cleverly than he would have managed anybody else's affairs, as generally happens. For instance, at a period when he was feeling more enthusiasm than usual for his colleague Wardlaw, and when Catherine was more accessible than usual, it suddenly occurred to him to make an effort to bring them together. Brought face to face, each *must* recognise the nobleness of the other. He felt boyishly confident of it. So he made it a point, tenderly but insistently, that Catherine should ask Wardlaw and his wife to come and see them. And Catherine, driven obscurely by a longing to yield in something, which recurred, and often terrified herself, yielded in this.

The Wardlaws, who in general never went into society, were asked to a quiet dinner in Bedford Square, and came. Then, of course, it appeared that Robert, with the idealist's blindness, had forgotten a hundred small differences of temperament and training which must make it impossible for Catherine, in a state of tension, to see the hero in James Wardlaw. It was an unlucky dinner. James Wardlaw, with all his heroisms and virtues, had long ago dropped most of those delicate intuitions and divinations, which make the charm of life in society, along the rough paths of a strenuous philanthropy. He had no tact, and, like most saints, he drew a certain amount of inspiration from a contented ignorance of his neighbour's point of view. Also, he was not a man who made much of women, and he held strong views as to the subordination of wives. It never occurred to him that Robert might have a Dissenter in his own household, and as, in spite of their speculative differences, he had always been accustomed to talk freely with Robert, he now talked freely to Robert plus his wife, assuming, as every good Comtist does, that the husband is the wife's pope.

Moreover, a solitary eccentric life, far from the society of his equals, had developed in him a good many crude Jacobinisms. His experience of London clergymen, for instance, had not been particularly favourable, and he had a store of anecdotes on the subject which Robert had heard before, but which now, repeated in Catherine's presence, seemed to have lost every shred of humour they once possessed. Poor Elsmere tried with all his might to divert the stream,

but it showed a tormenting tendency to recur to the same channel. And meanwhile the little spectacled wife, dressed in a high home-made cashmere, sat looking at her husband with a benevolent and smiling admiration. *She* kept all her eloquence for the poor.

After dinner things grew worse. Mrs. Wardlaw had recently presented her husband with a third infant, and the ardent pair had taken advantage of the visit to London of an eminent French Comtist to have it baptized with full Comtist rites. Wardlaw stood astride on the rug, giving the assembled company a minute account of the ceremony observed, while his wife threw in gentle explanatory interjections. The manner of both showed a certain exasperating confidence, if not in the active sympathy, at least in the impartial curiosity of their audience, and in the importance to modern religious history of the incident itself. Catherine's silence grew deeper and deeper; the conversation fell entirely to Robert. At last Robert, by main force, as it were, got Wardlaw off into politics, but the new Irish Coercion Bill was hardly introduced before the irrepressible being turned to Catherine, and said to her with smiling obtuseness, —

'I don't believe I've seen you at one of your husband's Sunday addresses yet, Mrs. Elsmere? And it is n't so far from this part of the world either.'

Catherine slowly raised her beautiful large eyes upon him. Robert, looking at her with a qualm, saw an expression he was learning to dread flash across the face.

'I have my Sunday-school at that time, Mr. Wardlaw. I am a Churchwoman.'

The tone had a touch of hauteur Robert had hardly ever heard from his wife before. It effectually stopped all further conversation. Wardlaw fell into silence, reflecting that he had been a fool. His wife, with a timid flush, drew out her knitting, and stuck to it for the twenty minutes that remained. Catherine immediately did her best to talk, to be pleasant; but the discomfort of the little party was too great. It broke up at ten, and the Wardlaws departed.

Catherine stood on the rug while Elsmere went with his guests to the door, waiting restlessly for her husband's return. Robert, however, came back to her, tired, wounded, and out of spirits, feeling that the attempt had been wholly unsuccessful, and shrinking from any further talk about it. He at once sat down to some letters for the late post. Catherine lingered a little, watching him, longing miserably, like any girl of eighteen, to throw herself on his neck and reproach him for their unhappiness, his friends — she knew not what! He all the time was intimately conscious of her presence, of her pale beauty, which now at twenty-nine, in spite of its severity, had a subtler finish and attraction than ever, of the restless little movements so unlike herself, which she made from time to time. But neither spoke except upon indifferent things. Once more the difficult conditions of their lives seemed too obvious, too oppressive. Both were ultimately conquered by the same sore impulse to let speech alone.

## CHAPTER XLII

And after this little scene, through the busy exciting weeks of the season which followed, Robert, taxed to the utmost on all sides, yielded to the impulse of silence more and more.

Society was another difficulty between them. Robert delighted in it so far as his East End life allowed him to have it. No one was ever more ready to take other men and women at their own valuation than he. Nothing was so easy to him as to believe in other people's goodness, or cleverness, or superhuman achievement. On the other hand, London is kind to such men as Robert Elsmere. His talk, his writing, were becoming known and relished; and even the most rigid of the old school found it difficult to be angry with him. His knowledge of the poor and of social questions attracted the men of action; his growing historical reputation drew the attention of the men of thought. Most people wished to know him and to talk to him, and Catherine, smiled upon for his sake, and assumed to be his chief disciple, felt herself more and more bewildered and antagonistic as the season rushed on.

For what pleasure could she get out of these dinners and these evenings, which supplied Robert with so much intellectual stimulus? With her all the moral nerves were jarring and out of tune. At any time Richard Leyburn's daughter would have found it hard

to tolerate a society where everything is an open question and all confessions of faith are more or less bad taste. But now, when there was no refuge to fall back upon in Robert's arms, no certainty of his sympathy — nay, a certainty that, however tender and pitiful he might be, he would still think her wrong and mistaken! She went here and there obediently because he wished; but her youth seemed to be ebbing, the old Murewell gaiety entirely left her, and people in general wondered why Elsmere should have married a wife older than himself, and apparently so unsuited to him in temperament.

Especially was she tried at Madame de Netteville's. For Robert's sake she tried for a time to put aside her first impression and to bear Madame de Netteville's evenings — little dreaming, poor thing, all the time that Madame de Netteville thought her presence at the famous 'Fridays' an incubus only to be put up with because the husband was becoming socially an indispensable.

But after two or three Fridays Catherine's endurance failed her. On the last occasion she found herself late in the evening hemmed in behind Madame de Netteville and a distinguished African explorer, who was the lion of the evening. Eugénie de Netteville had forgotten her silent neighbour, and presently, with some biting little phrase or other, she asked the great man his opinion on a burning topic of the day, the results of Church Missions in Africa. The great man laughed, shrugged his shoulders, and ran lightly through a string of stories in which both missionaries and converts played parts which were either grotesque

or worse. Madame de Netteville thought the stories amusing, and as one ceased she provoked another, her black eyes full of a dry laughter, her white hand lazily plying her great ostrich fan.

Suddenly a figure rose behind them.

'Oh, Mrs. Elsmere!' said Madame de Netteville, starting, and then coolly recovering herself, 'I had no idea you were there all alone. I am afraid our conversation has been disagreeable to you. I am afraid you are a friend of missions!'

And her glance, turning from Catherine to her companion, made a little malicious signal to him which only he detected, as though bidding him take note of a curiosity.

'Yes, I care for them, I wish for their success,' said Catherine, one hand, which trembled slightly, resting on the table beside her, her great grey eyes fixed on Madame de Netteville. 'No Christian has any right to do otherwise.'

Poor brave goaded soul! She had a vague idea of 'bearing testimony' as her father would have borne it in like circumstances. But she turned very pale. Even to her the word 'Christian' sounded like a bombshell in that room. The great traveller looked up astounded. He saw a tall woman in white with a beautiful head, a delicate face, a something indescribably noble and unusual in her whole look and attitude. She looked like a Quaker prophetess — like Dinah Morris in society — like — but his comparisons failed him. How did such a being come *there?* He was amazed; but he was a man of taste, and Madame de Netteville caught a certain æsthetic approbation in his look.

She rose, her expression hard and bright as usual.

'May one Christian pronounce for all?' she said with a scornful affectation of meekness. 'Mrs. Elsmere, please find some chair more comfortable than that ottoman; and Mr. Ansdale, will you come and be introduced to Lady Aubrey?'

After her guests had gone, Madame de Netteville came back to the fire flushed and frowning. It seemed to her that in that strange little encounter she had suffered, and she never forgot or forgave the smallest social discomfiture.

'Can I put up with that again?' she asked herself, with a contemptuous hardening of the lip. 'I suppose I must if *he* cannot be got without her. But I have an instinct that it is over — that she will not appear here again. Daudet might make use of her. I can't. What a specimen! A boy-and-girl match, I suppose. What else could have induced that poor wretch to cut his throat in such fashion? He, of all men!'

And Eugénie de Netteville stood thinking — not, apparently, of the puritanical wife; the dangerous softness which overspread the face could have had no connexion with Catherine.

Madame de Netteville's instinct was just. Catherine Elsmere never appeared again in her drawing-room.

But, with a little sad confession of her own invincible distaste, the wife pressed the husband to go without her. She urged it at a bitter moment, when it was clear to her that their lives must of necessity, even in outward matters, be more separate than before. Elsmere resisted for a time; then, lured one evening towards the end of February by the prospect conveyed

in a note from Madame de Netteville, wherein Catherine was mentioned in the most scrupulously civil terms, of meeting one of the most eminent of French critics, he went, and thenceforward went often. He had, so far, no particular liking for the hostess; he hated some of her habitués; but there was no doubt that in some ways she made an admirable holder of a salon, and that round about her there was a subtle mixture of elements, a liberty of discussion and comment, to be found nowhere else. And how bracing and refreshing was that free play of equal mind to the man weary sometimes of his leader's rôle and weary of himself!

As to the *woman*, his social naïveté, which was extraordinary, but in a man of his type most natural, made him accept her exactly as he found her. If there were two or three people in Paris or London who knew or suspected incidents of Madame de Netteville's young married days which made her reception at some of the strictest English houses a matter of cynical amusement to them, not the remotest inkling of their knowledge was ever likely to reach Elsmere. He was not a man who attracted scandals. Nor was it anybody's interest to spread them. Madame de Netteville's position in London society was obviously excellent. If she had peculiarities of manner and speech they were easily supposed to be French. Meanwhile she was undeniably rich and distinguished, and gifted with a most remarkable power of protecting herself and her neighbours from boredom. At the same time, though Elsmere was, in truth, more interested in her friends than in her, he could not possibly be insensible to the consideration shown for him in

her drawing-room. Madame de Netteville allowed herself plenty of jests with her intimates as to the young reformer's social simplicity, his dreams, his optimisms. But those intimates were the first to notice that as soon as he entered the room those optimisms of his were adroitly respected. She had various delicate contrivances for giving him the lead; she exercised a kind of surveillance over the topics introduced; or in conversation with him she would play that most seductive part of the cynic shamed out of cynicism by the neighbourhood of the enthusiast.

Presently she began to claim a practical interest in his Elgood Street work. Her offers were made with a curious mixture of sympathy and mockery. Elsmere could not take her seriously. But neither could he refuse to accept her money, if she chose to spend it on a library for Elgood Street, or to consult with her about the choice of books. This whim of hers created a certain friendly bond between them which was not present before. And on Elsmere's side it was strengthened when, one evening, in a corner of her inner drawing-room, Madame de Netteville suddenly, but very quietly, told him the story of her life — her English youth, her elderly French husband, the death of her only child, and her flight as a young widow to England during the war of 1870. She told the story of the child, as it seemed to Elsmere, with a deliberate avoidance of emotion, nay, even with a certain hardness. But it touched him profoundly. And everything else that she said, though she professed no great regret for her husband, or for the break-up of her French life, and though everything was reticent and measured,

deepened the impression of a real forlornness behind all the outward brilliance and social importance. He began to feel a deep and kindly pity for her, coupled with an earnest wish that he could help her to make her life more adequate and satisfying. And all this he showed in the look of his frank grey eyes, in the cordial grasp of the hand with which he said good-bye to her.

Madame de Netteville's gaze followed him out of the room — the tall boyish figure, the nobly carried head. The riddle of her flushed cheek and sparkling eye was hard to read. But there were one or two persons living who could have read it, and who could have warned you that the *true* story of Eugénie de Netteville's life was written, not in her literary studies or her social triumphs, but in various recurrent outbreaks of unbridled impulse — the secret, and in one or two cases the shameful landmarks of her past. And, as persons of experience, they could also have warned you that the cold intriguer, always mistress of herself, only exists in fiction, and that a certain poisoned and fevered interest in the religious leader, the young and pious priest, as such, is common enough among the corrupter women of all societies.

Towards the end of May she asked Elsmere to dine '*en petit comité*, a gentlemen's dinner — except for my cousin, Lady Aubrey Willert' — to meet an eminent Liberal Catholic, a friend of Montalembert's youth.

It was a week or two after the failure of the Wardlaw experiment. Do what each would, the sore silence between the husband and wife was growing, was swallowing up more of life.

'Shall I go, Catherine?' he asked, handing her the note.

'It would interest you,' she said gently, giving it back to him scrupulously, as though she had nothing to do with it.

He knelt down before her, and put his arms round her, looking at her with eyes which had a dumb and yet fiery appeal written in them. His heart was hungry for that old clinging dependence, that willing weakness of love, her youth had yielded him so gladly, instead of this silent strength of antagonism. The memory of her Murewell self flashed miserably through him as he knelt there, of her delicate penitence towards him after her first sight of Newcome, of their night walks during the Mile End epidemic. Did he hold now in his arms only the ghost and shadow of that Murewell Catherine?

She must have read the reproach, the yearning of his look, for she gave a little shiver, as though bracing herself with a kind of agony to resist.

'Let me go, Robert!' she said gently, kissing him on the forehead and drawing back. 'I hear Mary calling, and nurse is out.'

The days went on and the date of Madame de Netteville's dinner-party had come round. About seven o'clock that evening Catherine sat with the child in the drawing-room, expecting Robert. He had gone off early in the afternoon to the East End with Hugh Flaxman to take part in a committee of workmen organized for the establishment of a choral union in R——, the scheme of which had been Flaxman's chief contribution so far to the Elgood Street undertaking.

It seemed to her as she sat there working, the windows open on to the bit of garden, where the trees were already withered and begrimed, that the air without and her heart within were alike stifling and heavy with storm. *Something* must put an end to this oppression, this misery! She did not know herself. Her whole inner being seemed to her lessened and degraded by this silent struggle, this fever of the soul, which made impossible all those serenities and sweetnesses of thought in which her nature had always lived of old. The fight into which fate had forced her was destroying her. She was drooping like a plant cut off from all that nourishes its life.

And yet she never conceived it possible that she should relinquish that fight. Nay, at times there sprang up in her now a dangerous and despairing foresight of even worse things in store. In the middle of her suffering she already began to feel at moments the ascetic's terrible sense of compensation. What, after all, is the Christian life but warfare? *'I came not to send peace, but a sword!'*

Yes, in these June days Elsmere's happiness was perhaps nearer wreck than it had ever been. All strong natures grow restless under such a pressure as was now weighing on Catherine. Shock and outburst become inevitable.

So she sat alone this hot afternoon, haunted by presentiments, by vague terror for herself and him; while the child tottered about her, cooing, shouting, kissing, and all impulsively, with a ceaseless energy, like her father.

The outer door opened, and she heard Robert's step,

and apparently Mr. Flaxman's also. There was a hurried subdued word or two in the hall, and the two entered the room where she was sitting.

Robert came, pressing back the hair from his eyes with a gesture which with him was the invariable accompaniment of mental trouble. Catherine sprang up.

'Robert, you look so tired! and how late you are!' Then as she came nearer to him: 'And your coat — *torn — blood!*'

'There is nothing wrong with *me*, dear,' he said hastily, taking her hands — 'nothing! But it has been an awful afternoon. Flaxman will tell you. I must go to this place, I suppose, though I hate the thought of it! Flaxman, will you tell her all about it?' And, loosing his hold, he went heavily out of the room and upstairs.

'It has been an accident,' said Flaxman gently, coming forward, 'to one of the men of his class. May we sit down, Mrs. Elsmere? Your husband and I have gone through a good deal these last two hours.'

He sat down with a long breath, evidently trying to regain his ordinary even manner. His clothes, too, were covered with dust, and his hand shook. Catherine stood before him in consternation, while a nurse came for the child.

'We had just begun our committee at four o'clock,' he said at last, 'though only about half of the men had arrived, when there was a great shouting and commotion outside, and a man rushed in calling for Elsmere. We ran out, found a great crowd, a huge brewer's dray standing in the street, and a man run over. Your husband pushed his way in. I followed,

and, to my horror, I found him kneeling by — Charles Richards!'

'Charles Richards?' Catherine repeated vacantly.

Flaxman looked up at her, as though puzzled; then a flash of astonishment passed over his face.

'Elsmere has never told you of Charles Richards, the little gasfitter, who has been his right hand for the past three months?'

'No — never,' she said slowly.

Again he looked astonished; then he went on sadly: 'All this spring he has been your husband's shadow — I never saw such devotion. We found him lying in the middle of the road. He had only just left work, a man said who had been with him, and was running to the meeting. He slipped and fell, crossing the street, which was muddy from last night's rain. The dray swung round the corner — the driver was drunk or careless — and they went right over him. One foot was a sickening sight. Your husband and I luckily knew how to lift him for the best. We sent off for doctors. His home was in the next street, as it happened — nearer than any hospital; so we carried him there. The neighbours were round the door.'

Then he stopped himself.

'Shall I tell you the whole story?' he said kindly; 'it has been a tragedy! I won't give you details if you had rather not.'

'Oh no!' she said hurriedly; 'no — tell me.'

And she forgot to feel any wonder that Flaxman, in his chivalry, should treat her as though she were a girl with nerves.

'Well, it was the surroundings that were so ghastly.

When we got to the house an old woman rushed at me — "His wife's in there, but ye'll not find her in her senses; she's been at it from eight o'clock this morning. We've took the children away." I didn't know what she meant exactly till we got into the little front room. There, such a spectacle! A young woman on a chair by the fire sleeping heavily, dead drunk; the breakfast-things on the table, the sun blazing in on the dust and the dirt, and on the woman's face. I wanted to carry him into the room on the other side — he was unconscious; but a doctor had come up with us, and made us put him down on a bed there was in the corner. Then we got some brandy and poured it down. The doctor examined him, looked at his foot, threw something over it. "Nothing to be done," he said — "internal injuries — he can't live half an hour." The next minute the poor fellow opened his eyes. They had pulled away the bed from the wall. Your husband was on the farther side, kneeling. When he opened his eyes, clearly the first thing he saw was his wife. He half-sprang up — Elsmere caught him — and gave a horrible cry — indescribably horrible. "*At it again, at it again! My God!*" Then he fell back fainting. They got the wife out of the room between them — a perfect log — you could hear her heavy breathing from the kitchen opposite. We gave him more brandy and he came to again. He looked up in your husband's face. "She hasn't broke out for two months," he said, so piteously, "two months — and now — I'm done — I'm done — and she'll just go straight to the Devil!" And it comes out, so the neighbours told us, that for two years or more he had been patiently trying to

reclaim this woman, without a word of complaint to anybody, though his life must have been a dog's life. And now, on his deathbed, what seemed to be breaking his heart was, not that he was dying, but that his task was snatched from him!'

Flaxman paused, and looked away out of window. He told his story with difficulty.

'Your husband tried to comfort him — promised that the wife and children should be his special care, that everything that could be done to save and protect them should be done. And the poor little fellow looked up at him, with the tears running down his cheeks, and — and — blessed him. "I cared about nothing," he said, "when you came. You've been — God — to me — I've seen Him — in you." Then he asked us to say something. Your husband said verse after verse of the Psalms, of the Gospels, of St. Paul. His eyes grew filmy, but he seemed every now and then to struggle back to life, and as soon as he caught Elsmere's face his look lightened. Towards the last he said something we none of us caught; but your husband thought it was a line from Emily Brontë's "Hymn," which he said to them last Sunday in lecture.'

He looked up at her interrogatively, but there was no response in her face.

'I asked him about it,' the speaker went on, 'as we came home. He said Grey of St. Anselm's once quoted it to him, and he has had a love for it ever since.'

'Did he die while you were there?' asked Catherine presently after a silence. Her voice was dull and quiet. He thought her a strange woman.

'No,' said Flaxman, almost sharply; 'but by now it must be over. The last sign of consciousness was a murmur of his children's names. They brought them in, but his hands had to be guided to them. A few minutes after it seemed to me that he was really gone, though he still breathed. The doctor was certain there would be no more consciousness. We stayed nearly another hour. Then his brother came, and some other relations, and we left him. Oh, it is over now!'

Hugh Flaxman sat looking out into the dingy bit of London garden. Penetrated with pity as he was, he felt the presence of Elsmere's pale, silent, unsympathetic wife an oppression. How could she receive such a story in such a way?

The door opened and Robert came in hurriedly.

'Good-night, Catherine — he has told you?'

He stood by her, his hand on her shoulder, wistfully looking at her, the face full of signs of what he had gone through.

'Yes, it was terrible!' she said, with an effort.

His face fell. He kissed her on the forehead and went away.

When he was gone, Flaxman suddenly got up and leant against the open French window, looking keenly down on his companion. A new idea had stirred in him.

And presently, after more talk of the incident of the afternoon, and when he had recovered his usual manner, he slipped gradually into the subject of his own experiences in North R—— during the last six months. He assumed all through that she knew as much as there was to be known of Elsmere's work, and that she was as much interested as the normal wife is in her

husband's doings. His tact, his delicacy, never failed him for a moment. But he spoke of his own impressions, of matters within his personal knowledge. And since the Easter sermon he had been much on Elsmere's track; he had been filled with curiosity about him.

Catherine sat a little way from him, her blue dress lying in long folds about her, her head bent, her long fingers crossed on her lap. Sometimes she gave him a startled look, sometimes she shaded her eyes, while her other hand played silently with her watch-chain. Flaxman, watching her closely, however little he might seem to do so, was struck by her austere and delicate beauty as he had never been before.

She hardly spoke all through, but he felt that she listened without resistance, nay, at last that she listened with a kind of hunger. He went from story to story, from scene to scene, without any excitement, in his most ordinary manner, making his reserves now and then, expressing his own opinion when it occurred to him, and not always favourably. But gradually the whole picture emerged, began to live before them. At last he hurriedly looked at his watch.

'What a time I have kept you! It has been a relief to talk to you.'

'You have not had dinner!' she said, looking up at him with a sudden nervous bewilderment which touched him and subtly changed his impression of her.

'No matter. I will get some at home. Good-night!'

When he was gone she carried the child up to bed; her supper was brought to her solitary in the dining-room; and afterwards in the drawing-room, where a

soft twilight was fading into a soft and starlit night, she mechanically brought out some work for Mary, and sat bending over it by the window. After about an hour she looked up straight before her, threw her work down, and slipped on to the floor, her head resting on the chair.

The shock, the storm, had come. There for hours lay Catherine Elsmere weeping her heart away, wrestling with herself, with memory, with God. It was the greatest moral upheaval she had ever known — greater even than that which had convulsed her life at Murewell.

## CHAPTER XLIII

ROBERT, tired and sick at heart, felt himself in no mood this evening for a dinner-party in which conversation would be treated more or less as a fine art. Liberal Catholicism had lost its charm; his sympathetic interest in Montalembert, Lacordaire, Lamennais, had to be quickened, pumped up again as it were, by great efforts, which were constantly relaxed within him as he sped westwards by the recurrent memory of that miserable room, the group of men, the bleeding hand, the white dying face.

In Madame de Netteville's drawing-room he found a small number of people assembled. M. de Quérouelle, a middle-sized, round-headed old gentleman of a familiar French type; Lady Aubrey, thinner, more lath-like than ever, clad in some sumptuous mingling of dark red and silver; Lord Rupert, beaming under the recent introduction of a Land Purchase Bill for Ireland, by which he saw his way at last to wash his hands of 'a beastly set of tenants'; Mr. Wharncliffe, a young private secretary with a waxed moustache, six feet of height, and a general air of superlativeness which demanded and secured attention; a famous journalist, whose smiling self-repressive look assured you that he carried with him the secrets of several empires; and one Sir John Headlam, a little black-haired Jewish-looking man with a limp — an ex-Colonial Governor, who had made himself accepted in London as an amus-

ing fellow, but who was at least as much disliked by one half of society as he was popular with the other.

'Purely for talk, you see, not for show!' said Madame de Netteville to Robert, with a little smiling nod round her circle as they stood waiting for the commencement of dinner.

'I shall hardly do my part,' he said, with a little sigh. 'I have just come from a very different scene.'

She looked at him with inquiring eyes.

'A terrible accident in the East End,' he said briefly. 'We won't talk of it. I only mention it to propitiate you beforehand. Those things are not forgotten at once.'

She said no more, but seeing that he was indeed out of heart, physically and mentally, she showed the most subtle consideration for him at dinner. M. de Quérouelle was made to talk. His hostess wound him up and set him going, tune after tune. He played them all, and, by dint of long practice, to perfection, in the French way. A visit of his youth to the island grave of Châteaubriand; his early memories, as a poetical aspirant, of the magnificent flatteries by which Victor Hugo made himself the god of young romantic Paris; his talks with Montalembert in the days of *L'Avenir;* his memories of Lamennais's sombre figure, of Maurice de Guérin's feverish ethereal charm; his account of the opposition salons under the Empire—they had all been elaborated in the course of years, till every word fitted and each point led to the next with the 'inevitableness' of true art. Robert, at first silent and *distrait,* found it impossible after a while not to

listen with interest. He admired the skill, too, of Madame de Netteville's second in the duet, the finish, the alternate sparkle and melancholy of it; and at last he too was drawn in, and found himself listened to with great benevolence by the Frenchman, who had been informed about him, and regarded him indulgently, as one more curious specimen of English religious provincialisms. The journalist, Mr. Addlestone, who had won a European reputation for wisdom by a great scantiness of speech in society, coupled with the look of Minerva's owl, attached himself to them; while Lady Aubrey, Sir John Headlam, Lord Rupert, and Mr. Wharncliffe made a noisier and more dashing party at the other end.

'Are you still in your old quarters, Lady Aubrey?' asked Sir John Headlam, turning his old roguish face upon her. 'That house of Nell Gwynne's, was n't it, in Meade Street?'

'Oh dear, no! We could only get it up to May this year, and then they made us turn out for the season, for the first time for ten years. There is a tiresome young heir who has married a wife and wants to live in it. I could have left a train of gunpowder and a slow match behind, I was so cross!'

'Ah — "Reculer pour mieux *faire* sauter!" ' said Sir John, mincing out his *mot* as though he loved it.

'Not bad, Sir John,' she said, looking at him calmly, 'but you have way to make up. You were so dull the last time you took me in to dinner, that positively —'

'You began to wonder to what I owed my para-

graph in the *Société de Londres,*' he rejoined, smiling, though a close observer might have seen an angry flash in his little eyes. 'My dear Lady Aubrey, it was simply because I had not seen you for six weeks. My education had been neglected. I get my art and my literature from you. The last time but one we met, you gave me the cream of three new French novels and all the dramatic scandal of the period. I have lived on it for weeks. By the way, have you read the "Princesse de ——"?'

He looked at her audaciously. The book had affronted even Paris.

'I have n't,' she said, adjusting her bracelets, while she flashed a rapier-glance at him, 'but if I had, I should say precisely the same. Lord Rupert, will you kindly keep Sir John in order?'

Lord Rupert plunged in with the gallant floundering motion characteristic of him, while Mr. Wharncliffe followed like a modern gunboat behind a three-decker. As to that young man, the casual spectator, to borrow a famous Cambridge saying, invariably assumed that all 'the time he could spare from neglecting his duties he must spend in adorning his person.' Not at all! The *tenue* of a dandy was never more cleverly used to mask the schemes of a Disraeli or the hard ambition of a Talleyrand than in Master Frederick Wharncliffe, who was in reality going up the ladder hand over hand, and meant very soon to be on the top rungs.

It was a curious party, typical of the house, and of a certain stratum of London. When, every now and then, in the pauses of their own conversation, Elsmere

caught something of the chatter going on at the other end of the table, or when the party became fused into one for a while under the genial influence of a good story or the exhilaration of a personal skirmish, the whole scene — the dainty oval room, the lights, the servants, the exquisite fruit and flowers, the gleaming silver, the tapestried walls — would seem to him for an instant like a mirage, a dream, yet with something glittering and arid about it which a dream never has.

The hard self-confidence of these people — did it belong to the same world as that humbling, that heavenly self-abandonment which had shone on him that afternoon from Charles Richards's begrimed and blood-stained face? '*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*' he said to himself once with an inward groan. 'Why am I here? Why am I not at home with Catherine?'

But Madame de Netteville was pleasant to him. He had never seen her so womanly, never felt more grateful for her delicate social skill. As she talked to him, or to the Frenchman, of literature, or politics, or famous folk, flashing her beautiful eyes from one to the other, Sir John Headlam would, every now and then, turn his odd puckered face observantly towards the farther end of the table.

Upstairs smoking began, Lady Aubrey and Madame de Netteville joining in. M. de Quérouelle, having talked the best of his *répertoire* at dinner, was now inclined for amusement, and had discovered that Lady Aubrey could amuse him, and was, moreover, *une belle personne*. Madame de Netteville was obliged to give some time to Lord Rupert. The other men stood

chatting politics and the latest news, till Robert, conscious of a complete failure of social energy, began to look at his watch. Instantly Madame de Netteville glided up to him.

'Mr. Elsmere, you have talked no business to me, and I must know how my affairs in Elgood Street are getting on. Come into my little writing-room.' And she led him into a tiny panelled room at the far end of the drawing-room and shut off from it by a heavy curtain, which she now left half-drawn.

'The latest?' said Fred Wharncliffe to Lady Aubrey, raising his eyebrows with the slightest motion of the head towards the writing-room.

'I suppose so,' she said indifferently; 'she is East-Ending for a change. We all do it nowadays. It is like Dizzy's young man who "liked bad wine, he was so bored with good."'

Meanwhile, Madame de Netteville was leaning against the open window of the fantastic little room, with Robert beside her.

'You look as if you had had a strain,' she said to him abruptly, after they had talked business for a few minutes. 'What has been the matter?'

He told her Richards's story, very shortly. It would have been impossible to him to give more than the driest outline of it in that room. His companion listened gravely. She was an epicure in all things, especially in moral sensation, and she liked his moments of reserve and strong self-control. They made his general expansiveness more distinguished.

Presently there was a pause, which she broke by saying, —

'I was at your lecture last Sunday — you didn't see me!'

'Were you? Ah! I remember a person in black, and veiled, who puzzled me. I don't think we want you there, Madame de Netteville.'

His look was pleasant, but his tone had some decision in it.

'Why not? Is it only the artisans who have souls? A reformer should refuse no one.'

'You have your own opportunities,' he said quietly; 'I think the men prefer to have it to themselves for the present. Some of them are dreadfully in earnest.'

'Oh, I don't pretend to be in earnest,' she said, with a little wave of her hand; 'or, at any rate, I know better than to talk of earnestness to *you*.'

'Why to me?' he asked, smiling.

'Oh, because you and your like have your fixed ideas of the upper class and the lower. One social type fills up your horizon. You are not interested in any other, and, indeed, you know nothing of any other.'

She looked at him defiantly. Everything about her to-night was splendid and regal — her dress of black and white brocade, the diamonds at her throat, the carriage of her head, nay, the marks of experience and living on the dark subtle face.

'Perhaps not,' he replied; 'it is enough for one life to try and make out where the English working class is tending to.'

'You are quite wrong, utterly wrong. The man who keeps his eye only on the lower class will achieve

nothing. What can the idealist do without the men of action — the men who can take his beliefs and make them enter by violence into existing institutions? And the men of action are to be found with *us*.'

'It hardly looks just now as if the upper class was to go on enjoying a monopoly of them,' he said, smiling.

'Then appearances are deceptive. The populace supplies mass and weight — nothing else. What *you* want is to touch the leaders, the men and women whose voices carry, and then your populace would follow hard enough. For instance,' — and she dropped her aggressive tone and spoke with a smiling kindness, — 'come down next Saturday to my little Surrey cottage; you shall see some of these men and women there, and I will make you confess when you go away that you have profited your workmen more by deserting them than by staying with them. Will you come?'

'My Sundays are too precious to me just now, Madame de Netteville. Besides, my firm conviction is that the upper class can produce a Brook Farm, but nothing more. The religious movement of the future will want a vast effusion of feeling and passion to carry it into action, and feeling and passion are only to be generated in sufficient volume among the masses, where the vested interests of all kinds are less tremendous. You upper-class folk have your part, of course. Woe betide you if you shirk it — but —'

'Oh, let us leave it alone,' she said with a little shrug. 'I know you would give us all the work and refuse us

all the profits. We are to starve for your workman, to give him our hearts and purses and everything we have, not that we may hoodwink him — which might be worth doing — but that he may rule us. It is too much!'

'Very well,' he said drily, his colour rising. 'Very well, let it be too much.'

And, dropping his lounging attitude, he stood erect, and she saw that he meant to be going. Her look swept over him from head to foot — over the worn face with its look of sensitive refinement and spiritual force, the active frame, the delicate but most characteristic hand. Never had any man so attracted her for years; never had she found it so difficult to gain a hold. Eugénie de Netteville, *poseuse*, schemer, woman of the world that she was, was losing command of herself.

'What did you really mean by "worldliness" and the "world" in your lecture last Sunday?' she asked him suddenly, with a little accent of scorn. 'I thought your diatribes absurd. What you religious people call the "world" is really only the average opinion of sensible people which neither you nor your kind could do without for a day.'

He smiled, half-amused by her provocative tone, and defended himself not very seriously. But she threw all her strength into the argument, and he forgot that he had meant to go at once. When she chose she could talk admirably, and she chose now. She had the most aggressive ways of attacking, and then, in the same breath, the most subtle and softening ways of yielding and, as it were, of asking pardon. Directly

her antagonist turned upon her he found himself disarmed he knew not how. The disputant disappeared, and he felt the woman, restless, melancholy, sympathetic, hungry for friendship and esteem, yet too proud to make any direct bid for either. It was impossible not to be interested and touched.

Such at least was the woman whom Robert Elsmere felt. Whether in his hours of intimacy with her, twelve months before, young Alfred Evershed had received the same impression may be doubted. In all things Eugénie de Netteville was an artist.

Suddenly the curtain dividing them from the larger drawing-room was drawn back, and Sir John Headlam stood in the doorway. He had the glittering amused eyes of a malicious child as he looked at them.

'Very sorry, madame,' he began in his high cracked voice, 'but Wharncliffe and I are off to the New Club to see Desforêts. They have got her there tonight.'

'Go,' she said, waving her hand to him, 'I don't envy you. She is not what she was.'

'No, there is only one person,' he said, bowing with grotesque little airs of gallantry, 'for whom time stands still.'

Madame de Netteville looked at him with smiling half-contemptuous serenity. He bowed again, this time with ironical emphasis, and disappeared.

'Perhaps I had better go back and send them off,' she said, rising. 'But you and I have not had our talk out yet.'

She led the way into the drawing-room. Lady

Aubrey was lying back on the velvet sofa, a little green paroquet that was accustomed to wander tamely about the room perching on her hand. She was holding the field against Lord Rupert and Mr. Addlestone in a three-cornered duel of wits, while M. de Quérouelle sat by, his plump hands on his knees, applauding.

They all rose as their hostess came in.

'My dear,' said Lady Aubrey, 'it is disgracefully early, but my country before pleasure. It is the Foreign Office to-night, and since James took office I can't with decency absent myself. I had rather be a scullerymaid than a minister's wife. Lord Rupert, I will take you on if you want a lift.'

She touched Madame de Netteville's cheek with her lips, nodding to the other men present, and went out, her fair stag-like head well in the air, 'chaffing' Lord Rupert, who obediently followed her, performing marvellous feats of agility in his desire to keep out of the way of the superb train sweeping behind her. It always seemed as if Lady Aubrey could have had no childhood, as if she must always have had just that voice and those eyes. Tears she could never have shed, not even as a baby over a broken toy. Besides, at no period of her life could she have looked upon a lost possession as anything else than the opportunity for a new one.

The other men took their departure for one reason or another. It was not late, but London was in full swing, and M. de Quérouelle talked with affected boredom of four houses at which he must still 'look in.'

As she dismissed Mr. Wharncliffe, Robert too held out his hand.

'No,' she said, with a quick impetuousness, 'no: I want my talk out. It is barely half-past ten, and neither of us wants to be racing about London to-night.

Elsmere had always a certain lack of social decision, and he lingered rather reluctantly — for another ten minutes, as he supposed.

She threw herself into a low chair. The windows were open to the back of the house, and the roar of Piccadilly and Sloane Street came borne in upon the warm night air. Her superb dark head stood out against a stand of yellow lilies close behind her, and the little paroquet, bright with all the colours of the tropics, perched now on her knee, now on the back of her chair, touched every now and then by quick unsteady fingers.

Then an incident followed which Elsmere remembered to his dying day with shame and humiliation.

In ten minutes from the time of their being left alone, a woman who was five years his senior had made him what was practically a confession of love — had given him to understand that she knew what were the relations between himself and his wife — and had implored him with the quick breath of an indescribable excitement to see what a woman's sympathy and a woman's unique devotion could do for the causes he had at heart.

The truth broke upon Elsmere very slowly, awakening in him, when at last it was unmistakeable, a swift agony of repulsion, which his most friendly biographer can only regard with a kind of grim satisfaction. For after all there is an amount of innocence and absent-

mindedness in matters of daily human life, which is not only *niaiserie*, but comes very near to moral wrong. In this crowded world a man has no business to walk about with his eyes always on the stars. His stumbles may have too many consequences. A harsh but a salutary truth! If Elsmere needed it, it was bitterly taught him during a terrible half-hour. When the half-coherent enigmatical sentences, to which he listened at first with a perplexed surprise, began gradually to define themselves; when he found a woman roused and tragically beautiful between him and escape; when no determination on his part not to understand; when nothing he could say availed to protect her from herself; when they were at last face to face with a confession and an appeal which were a disgrace to both — then at last Elsmere paid 'in one minute glad life's arrears,' — the natural penalty of an optimism, a boundless faith in human nature, with which life, as we know it, is inconsistent.

How he met the softness, the grace, the seduction of a woman who was an expert in all the arts of fascination he never knew. In memory afterwards it was all a ghastly mirage to him. The low voice, the splendid dress, the scented room came back to him, and a confused memory of his own futile struggle to ward off what she was bent on saying — little else. He had been maladroit, he thought, had lost his presence of mind. Any man of the world of his acquaintance, he believed, trampling on himself, would have done better.

But when the softness and the grace were all lost in smart and humiliation, when the Madame de Nette-

ville of ordinary life disappeared, and something took her place which was like a coarse and malignant underself suddenly brought into the light of day — from that point onwards, in after days, he remembered it all.

'. . . I know,' cried Eugénie de Netteville at last, standing at bay before him, her hands locked before her, her white lips quivering, when her cup of shame was full, and her one impulse left was to strike the man who had humiliated her — 'I know that you and your puritanical wife are miserable — *miserable.* What is the use of denying facts that all the world can see, that you have taken pains,' and she laid a fierce deliberate emphasis on each word, 'all the world shall see? There — let your wife's ignorance and bigotry, and your own obvious relation to her, be my excuse, if I wanted any; but,' and she shrugged her white shoulders passionately, 'I want *none!* I am not responsible to your petty codes. Nature and feelings are enough for me. I saw you wanting sympathy and affection —'

'My wife!' cried Robert, hearing nothing but that one word. And then, his glance sweeping over the woman before him, he made a stern step forward.

'Let me go, Madame de Netteville, let me go, or I shall forget that you are a woman and I a man, and that in some way I cannot understand my own blindness and folly —'

'Must have led to this most undesirable scene,' she said, with mocking suddenness, throwing herself, however, effectually in his way. Then a change came over her, and erect, ghastly white, with frown-

ing brow and shaking limbs, a baffled and smarting woman, from whom every restraint had fallen away, let loose upon him a torrent of gall and bitterness which he could not have cut short without actual violence.

He stood proudly enduring it, waiting for the moment when what seemed to him an outbreak of mania should have spent itself. But suddenly he caught Catherine's name coupled with some contemptuous epithet or other, and his self-control failed him. With flashing eyes he went close up to her and took one hand in a grip of iron.

'You shall not,' he said, beside himself, 'you shall not! What have I done — what has she done — that you should allow yourself such words? My poor wife!'

A passionate flood of self-reproachful love was on his lips. He choked it back. It was desecration that Catherine's name should be mentioned in that room. He dropped the hand he held. His resolute gesture bade the woman before him give way and let him go.

Madame de Netteville looked at him wildly for a moment, at the stern manliness of the face which seemed in this half-hour to have grown older, at the attitude with its mingled dignity and appeal. Then, still holding him, as it were, with menacing defiant eyes, she moved aside, she waved her hand with a contemptuous gesture of dismissal. He bowed, passed her, and the door shut.

For nearly an hour afterwards Elsmere wandered blindly and aimlessly through the darkness and silence of the park.

The sensitive optimist nature was all unhinged, felt itself wrestling in the grip of dark implacable things, upheld by a single thread above that moral abyss which yawns beneath us all, into which the individual life sinks so easily to ruin and nothingness. At such moments a man realises within himself, within the circle of consciousness, the germs of all things hideous and vile. '*Save for the grace of God,*' he says to himself, shuddering, 'save only for the grace of God —'

Contempt for himself, loathing for life and its possibilities, as he had just beheld them; moral tumult, pity, remorse, a stinging self-reproach — all these things wrestled within him. What, preach to others, and stumble himself into such mire as this? Talk loudly of love and faith, and make it possible all the time that a fellow human creature should think you capable at a pinch of the worst treason against both?

Elsmere dived to the very depths of his own soul that night. Was it all the natural consequence of a loosened bond, of a wretched relaxation of effort — a wretched acquiescence in something second best? Had love been cooling? Had it simply ceased to take the trouble love must take to maintain itself? And had this horror been the subtle inevitable Nemesis?

All at once, under the trees of the park, Elsmere stopped for a moment in the darkness, and bared his head, with the passionate reverential action of a devotee before his saint. The lurid image which had been pursuing him gave way, and in its place came the

image of a new-made mother, her child close within her sheltering arm. Ah! it was all plain to him now. The moral tempest had done its work.

One task of all tasks had been set him from the beginning — to keep his wife's love! If she had slipped away from him, to the injury and moral lessening of both, on his cowardice, on his clumsiness, be the blame! Above all, on his fatal power of absorbing himself in a hundred outside interests, controversy, literature, society. Even his work seemed to have lost half its sacredness. If there be a canker at the root, no matter how large the show of leaf and blossom overhead, there is but the more to wither! Of what worth is any success but that which is grounded deep on the rock of personal love and duty?

Oh! let him go back to her! — wrestle with her, open his heart again, try new ways, make new concessions. How faint the sense of *her* trial has been growing within him of late! hers which had once been more terrible to him than his own! He feels the special temptations of his own nature; he throws himself, humbled, convicted, at her feet. The woman, the scene he has left, is effaced, blotted out by the natural intense reaction of remorseful love.

So he sped homewards at last through the noise of Oxford Street, seeing, hearing nothing. He opened his own door, and let himself into the dim, silent house. How the moment recalled to him that other supreme moment of his life at Murewell! No light in the drawing-room. He went upstairs and softly turned the handle of her room.

Inside the room seemed to him nearly dark. But the window was wide open. The free loosely-growing branches of the plane-trees made a dark, delicate network against the luminous blue of the night. A cool air came to him laden with an almost rural scent of earth and leaves. By the window sat a white motionless figure. As he closed the door it rose and walked towards him without a word. Instinctively Robert felt that something unknown to him had been passing here. He paused breathless, expectant.

She came to him. She linked her cold trembling fingers round his neck.

'Robert, I have been waiting so long — it was so late! I thought' — and she choked down a sob — 'perhaps something has happened to him, we are separated for ever, and I shall never be able to tell him. Robert, Mr. Flaxman talked to me; he opened my eyes; I have been so cruel to you, so hard! I have broken my vow. I don't deserve it; but — *Robert!* —'

She had spoken with extraordinary self-command till the last word, which fell into a smothered cry for pardon. Catherine Elsmere had very little of the soft clingingness which makes the charm of a certain type of woman. Each phrase she had spoken had seemed to take with it a piece of her life. She trembled and tottered in her husband's arms.

He bent over her with half-articulate words of amazement, of passion. He led her to her chair, and, kneeling before her, he tried, so far as the emotion of both would let him, to make her realise what was in his *own* heart, the penitence and longing which had

winged his return to her. Without a mention of Madame de Netteville's name, indeed! *That* horror she should never know. But it was to it, as he held his wife, he owed his poignant sense of something half-jeopardised and wholly recovered; it was that consciousness in the background of his mind, ignorant of it as Catherine was then and always, which gave the peculiar epoch-making force to this sacred and critical hour of their lives. But she would hear nothing of his self-blame — nothing. She put her hand across his lips.

'I have seen things as they are, Robert,' she said, very simply; 'while I have been sitting here, and downstairs, after Mr. Flaxman left me. You were right — I *would* not understand. And, in a sense, I shall never understand. I cannot change,' and her voice broke into piteousness. 'My Lord is my Lord always; but He is yours too. Oh, I know it, say what you will! *That* is what has been hidden from me; that is what my trouble has taught me; the powerlessness, the worthlessness, of words. *It is the spirit that quickeneth.* I should never have felt it so but for this fiery furnace of pain. But I have been wandering in strange places, through strange thoughts. God has not one language, but many. I have dared to think He had but one, the one I knew. I have dared' — and she faltered — 'to condemn your faith as no faith. Oh! I lay there so long in the dark downstairs, seeing you by that bed; I heard your voice, I crept to your side. Jesus was there, too. Ah, He was — He was! Leave me that comfort! What are you saying? Wrong — you? Unkind? Your wife knows nothing of it. Oh,

did you think when you came in just now before dinner that I did n't care, that I had a heart of stone? Did you think I had broken my solemn promise, my vow to you that day at Murewell? So I have, a hundred times over. I made it in ignorance; I had not counted the cost — how could I? It was all so new, so strange. I dare not make it again, the will is so weak, circumstances so strong. But oh! take me back into your life! Hold me there! Remind me always of this night; convict me out of my own mouth! But I *will* learn my lesson; I will learn to hear the two voices, the voice that speaks to you and the voice that speaks to me — I must. It is all plain to me now. It has been appointed me.'

Then she broke down into a kind of weariness, and fell back in her chair, her delicate fingers straying with soft childish touch over his hair.

'But I am past thinking. Let us bury it all, and begin again. Words are nothing.'

Strange ending to a day of torture! As she towered above him in the dimness, white and pure and drooping, her force of nature all dissolved, lost in this new heavenly weakness of love, he thought of the man who passed through the place of sin, and the place of expiation, and saw at last the rosy light creeping along the East, caught the white moving figures, and that sweet distant melody rising through the luminous air, which announced to him the approach of Beatrice and the nearness of those 'shining tablelands whereof our God Himself is moon and sun.' For eternal life, the ideal state, is not something future and distant. Dante knew it when he talked of '*quella que imparadisa la*

*mia mente.'* Paradise is here, visible and tangible by mortal eyes and hands, whenever self is lost in loving, whenever the narrow limits of personality are beaten down by the inrush of the Divine Spirit.

## CHAPTER XLIV

THE saddest moment in the lives of these two persons whose history we have followed for so long was over and done with. Henceforward to the end Elsmere and his wife were lovers as of old.

But that day and night left even deeper marks on Robert than on Catherine. Afterwards she gradually came to feel, running all through his views of life, a note sterner, deeper, maturer than any present there before. The reasons for it were unknown to her, though sometimes her own tender, ignorant remorse supplied them. But they were hidden deep in Elsmere's memory.

A few days afterwards he was casually told that Madame de Netteville had left England for some time. As a matter of fact he never set eyes on her again. After a while the extravagance of his self-blame abated. He saw things as they were — without morbidness. But a certain boyish carelessness of mood he never afterwards quite recovered. Men and women of all classes, and not only among the poor, became more real and more tragic — moral truths more awful — to him. It was the penalty of a highly-strung nature set with exclusive intensity towards certain spiritual ends.

On the first opportunity after that conversation with Hugh Flaxman which had so deeply affected her, Catherine accompanied Elsmere to his Sunday lecture.

He tried a little, tenderly, to dissuade her. But she went, shrinking and yet determined.

She had not heard him speak in public since that last sermon of his in Murewell Church, every detail of which by long brooding had been burnt into her mind. The bare Elgood Street room, the dingy outlook on the high walls of a warehouse opposite, the lines of blanched quick-eyed artisans, the dissent from what she loved, and he had once loved, implied in everything, the lecture itself, on the narratives of the Passion; it was all exquisitely painful to her, and, yet, yet she was glad to be there.

Afterwards Wardlaw, with the brusque remark to Elsmere that 'any fool could see he was getting done up,' insisted on taking the children's class. Catherine, too, had been impressed, as she saw Robert raised a little above her in the glare of many windows, with the sudden perception that the worn, exhausted look of the preceding summer had returned upon him. She held out her hand to Wardlaw with a quick, warm word of thanks. He glanced at her curiously. What had brought her there after all?

Then Robert, protesting that he was being ridiculously coddled, and that Wardlaw was much more in want of a holiday than he, was carried off to the Embankment, and the two spent a happy hour wandering westward, Somerset House, the bridges, the Westminster towers rising before them into the haze of the June afternoon. A little fresh breeze came off the river; that, or his wife's hand on his arm, seemed to put new life into Elsmere. And she walked beside him, talking frankly, heart to heart, with flashes of

her old sweet gaiety, as she had not talked for months.

Deep in her mystical sense all the time lay the belief in a final restoration, in an all-atoning moment, perhaps at the very end of life, in which the blind would see, the doubter be convinced. And, meanwhile, the blessedness of this peace, this surrender! Surely the air this afternoon was pure and life-giving for them, the bells rang for them, the trees were green for them!

He had need in the week that followed of all that she had given back to him. For Mr. Grey's illness had taken a dangerous and alarming turn. It seemed to be the issue of long ill-health, and the doctors feared that there were no resources of constitution left to carry him through it. Every day some old St. Anselm's friend on the spot wrote to Elsmere, and with each post the news grew more despairing. Since Elsmere had left Oxford he could count on the fingers of one hand the occasions on which he and Grey had met face to face. But for him, as for many another man of our time, Henry Grey's influence was not primarily an influence of personal contact. His mere life, that he was there, on English soil, within a measureable distance, had been to Elsmere in his darkest moments one of his thoughts of refuge. At a time when a religion which can no longer be believed clashes with a scepticism full of danger to conduct, every such witness as Grey to the power of a new and coming truth holds a special place in the hearts of men who can neither accept fairy-tales, nor reconcile themselves to a world without faith. The saintly life grows to be a beacon,

a witness. Men cling to it as they have always clung to each other, to the visible and the tangible; as the elders of Miletus, though the Way lay before them, clung to the man who had set their feet therein, 'sorrowing most of all that they should see his face no more.'

The accounts grew worse — all friends shut out, no possibility of last words — the whole of Oxford moved and sorrowing. Then at last, on a Friday, came the dreaded expected letter: 'He is gone! He died early this morning, without pain, conscious almost to the end. He mentioned several friends by name, you among them, during the night. The funeral is to be on Tuesday. You will be here, of course.'

Sad and memorable day! By an untoward chance it fell in Commemoration Week, and Robert found the familiar streets teeming with life and noise, under a showery uncertain sky, which every now and then would send the bevies of lightly-gowned maidens, with their mothers and attendant squires, skurrying for shelter, and leave the roofs and pavements glistening. He walked up to St. Anselm's — found, as he expected, that the first part of the service was to be in the chapel, the rest in the cemetery, and then mounted the well-known staircase to Langham's rooms. Langham was apparently in his bedroom. Lunch was on the table — the familiar commons, the familiar toast-and-water. There, in a recess, were the same splendid wall maps of Greece he had so often consulted after lecture. There was the little case of coins, with the gold Alexanders he had handled with so much covetous reverence at eighteen. Outside, the irregular quad-

rangle with its dripping trees stretched before him; the steps of the new Hall, now the shower was over, were crowded with gowned figures. It might have been yesterday that he had stood in that room, blushing with awkward pleasure under Mr. Grey's first salutation.

The bedroom door opened and Langham came in.

'Elsmere! But of course I expected you.'

His voice seemed to Robert curiously changed. There was a flatness in it, an absence of positive cordiality which was new to him in any greeting of Langham's to himself, and had a chilling effect upon him. The face, too, was changed. Tint and expression were both dulled; its marble-like sharpness and finish had coarsened a little, and the figure, which had never possessed the erectness of youth, had now the pinched look and the confirmed stoop of the valetudinarian.

'I did not write to you, Elsmere,' he said immediately, as though in anticipation of what the other would be sure to say; 'I knew nothing but what the bulletins said, and I was told that Cathcart wrote to you. It is many years now since I have seen much of Grey. Sit down and have some lunch. We have time, but not too much time.'

Robert took a few mouthfuls. Langham was difficult, talked disconnectedly of trifles, and Robert was soon painfully conscious that the old sympathetic bond between them no longer existed. Presently, Langham, as though with an effort to remember, asked after Catherine, then inquired what he was doing in the way of writing, and neither of them mentioned the

name of Leyburn. They left the table and sat spasmodically talking, in reality expectant. And at last the sound present already in both minds made itself heard — the first long solitary stroke of the chapel bell.

Robert covered his eyes.

'Do you remember in this room, Langham, you introduced us first?'

'I remember,' replied the other abruptly. Then, with a half-cynical, half-melancholy scrutiny of his companion, he said, after a pause, 'What a faculty of hero-worship you have always had, Elsmere!'

'Do you know anything of the end?' Robert asked him presently, as that tolling bell seemed to bring the strong feeling beneath more irresistibly to the surface.

'No, I never asked!' cried Langham, with sudden harsh animation. 'What purpose could be served? Death should be avoided by the living. We have no business with it. Do what we will, we cannot rehearse our own parts. And the sight of other men's performances helps us no more than the sight of a great actor gives the dramatic gift. All they do for us is to imperil the little nerve, break through the little calm, we have left.'

Elsmere's hand dropped, and he turned round to him with a flashing smile.

'Ah — I know it now — you loved him still.'

Langham, who was standing, looked down on him sombrely, yet more indulgently.

'How much you always made of feeling,' he said after a little pause, 'in a world where, according to me, our chief object should be not to feel!'

Then he began to hunt for his cap and gown. In another minute the two made part of the crowd in the front quadrangle, where the rain was sprinkling, and the insistent grief-laden voice of the bell rolled, from pause to pause, above the gowned figures, spreading thence in wide waves of mourning sound over Oxford.

The chapel service passed over Robert like a solemn pathetic dream. The lines of undergraduate faces, the Provost's white head, the voice of the chaplain reading, the full male unison of the voices replying — how they carried him back to the day when as a lad from school he had sat on one of the chancel benches beside his mother, listening for the first time to the subtle simplicity, if one may be allowed the paradox, of the Provost's preaching! Just opposite to where he sat now with Langham, Grey had sat that first afternoon; the freshman's curious eyes had been drawn again and again to the dark massive head, the face with its look of reposeful force, of righteous strength. During the lesson from Corinthians, Elsmere's thoughts were irrelevantly busy with all sorts of mundane memories of the dead. What was especially present to him was a series of Liberal election meetings in which Grey had taken a warm part, and in which he himself had helped just before he took Orders. A hundred odd, incongruous details came back to Robert now with poignant force. Grey had been to him at one time primarily the professor, the philosopher, the representative of all that was best in the life of the University; now, fresh from his own grapple with London and its life, what moved him

most was the memory of the citizen, the friend and brother of common man, the thinker who had never shirked action in the name of thought, for whom conduct had been from beginning to end the first reality.

The procession through the streets afterwards, which conveyed the body of this great son of modern Oxford to its last resting-place in the citizens' cemetery on the western side of the town, will not soon be forgotten, even in a place which forgets notoriously soon. All the University was there, all the town was there. Side by side with men honourably dear to England, who had carried with them into one or other of the great English careers the memory of the teacher, were men who had known from day to day the cheery modest helper in a hundred local causes; side by side with the youth of Alma Mater went the poor of Oxford; tradesmen and artisans followed or accompanied the group of gowned and venerable figures, representing the Heads of Houses and the Professors, or mingled with the slowly pacing crowd of Masters; while along the route groups of visitors and merry-makers, young men in flannels or girls in light dresses, stood with suddenly grave faces here and there, caught by the general wave of mourning, and wondering what such a spectacle might mean.

Robert, losing sight of Langham as they left the chapel, found his arm grasped by young Cathcart, his correspondent. The man was a junior Fellow who had attached himself to Grey during the two preceding years with especial devotion. Robert had only a slight knowledge of him, but there was something in

his voice and grip which made him feel at once infinitely more at home with him at this moment than he had felt with the old friend of his undergraduate years.

They walked down Beaumont Street together. The rain came on again, and the long black crowd stretched before them was lashed by the driving gusts. As they went along, Cathcart told him all he wanted to know.

'The night before the end he was perfectly calm and conscious. I told you he mentioned your name among the friends to whom he sent his good-bye. He thought for everybody. For all those of his House he left the most minute and tender directions. He forgot nothing. And all with such extraordinary simplicity and quietness, like one arranging for a journey! In the evening an old Quaker aunt of his, a North-country woman whom he had been much with as a boy, and to whom he was much attached, was sitting with him. I was there too. She was a beautiful old figure in her white cap and kerchief, and it seemed to please him to lie and look at her. "It'll not be for long, Henry," she said to him once. "I'm seventy-seven this spring. I shall come to you soon." He made no reply, and his silence seemed to disturb her. I don't fancy she had known much of his mind of late years. "You'll not be doubting the Lord's goodness, Henry?" she said to him, with the tears in her eyes. "No," he said, "no, never. Only it seems to be His Will we should be certain of nothing — *but Himself!* I ask no more." I shall never forget the accent of those words: they were the breath of his inmost life. If ever man was *Gottbetrunken* it was he — and yet not a word beyond

what he felt to be true, beyond what the intellect could grasp!'

Twenty minutes later Robert stood by the open grave. The rain beat down on the black concourse of mourners. But there were blue spaces in the drifting sky, and a wavering rainy light played at intervals over the Wytham and Hinksey Hills, and over the buttercupped river meadows, where the lush hay-grass bent in long lines under the showers. To his left, the Provost, his glistening white head bare to the rain, was reading the rest of the service.

As the coffin was lowered Elsmere bent over the grave. 'My friend, my master,' cried the yearning filial heart, 'oh, give me something of yourself to take back into life, something to brace me through this darkness of our ignorance, something to keep hope alive as you kept it to the end!'

And on the inward ear there rose, with the solemnity of a last message, words which years before he had found marked in a little book of Meditations borrowed from Grey's table — words long treasured and often repeated —

'Amid a world of forgetfulness and decay, in the sight of his own shortcomings and limitations, or on the edge of the tomb, he alone who has found his soul in losing it, who in singleness of mind *has lived in order to love and understand*, will find that the God who is near to him as his own conscience has a face of light and love!'

Pressing the phrases into his memory, he listened to the triumphant outbursts of the Christian service.

'Man's hope,' he thought, 'has grown humbler than

this. It keeps now a more modest mien in the presence of the Eternal Mystery; but is it in truth less real, less sustaining? Let Grey's trust answer for me.'

He walked away, absorbed, till at last in the little squalid street outside the cemetery it occurred to him to look round for Langham. Instead, he found Cathcart, who had just come up with him.

'Is Langham behind?' he asked. 'I want a word with him before I go.'

'Is he here?' asked the other with a change of expression.

'But of course! He was in the chapel. How could you —'

'I thought he would probably go away,' said Cathcart, with some bitterness. 'Grey made many efforts to get him to come and see him before he became so desperately ill. Langham came once. Grey never asked for him again.'

'It is his old horror of expression, I suppose,' said Robert, troubled; 'his dread of being forced to take a line, to face anything certain and irrevocable. I understand. He could not say good-bye to a friend to save his life. There is no shirking that! One must either do it or leave it!'

Cathcart shrugged his shoulders, and drew a masterly little picture of Langham's life in college. He had succeeded by the most adroit devices in completely isolating himself both from the older and the younger men.

'He attends college-meeting sometimes, and contributes a sarcasm or two on the cramming system of the college. He takes a constitutional to Summer-

town every day on the least frequented side of the road, that he may avoid being spoken to. And as to his ways of living, he and I happen to have the same scout — old Dobson, you remember? And if I would let him, he would tell me tales by the hour. He is the only man in the University who knows anything about it. I gather from what he says that Langham is becoming a complete valetudinarian. Everything must go exactly by rule — his food, his work, the management of his clothes — and any little *contretemps* makes him ill. But the comedy is to watch him when there is anything going on in the place that he thinks may lead to a canvass and to any attempt to influence him for a vote. On these occasions he goes off with automatic regularity to an hotel at West Malvern, and only reappears when the *Times* tells him the thing is done with.'

Both laughed. Then Robert sighed. Weaknesses of Langham's sort may be amusing enough to the contemptuous and unconcerned outsider. But the general result of them, whether for the man himself or those whom he affects, is tragic, not comic; and Elsmere had good reason for knowing it.

Later, after a long talk with the Provost, and meetings with various other old friends, he walked down to the station, under a sky clear from rain, and through a town gay with festal preparations. Not a sign now, in these crowded, bustling streets, of that melancholy pageant of the afternoon. The heroic memory had flashed for a moment like something vivid and gleaming in the sight of all, understanding and ignorant. Now it lay committed to a few faithful hearts, there

to become one seed among many of a new religious life in England.

On the platform Robert found himself nervously accosted by a tall shabbily-dressed man.

'Elsmere, have you forgotten me?'

He turned and recognised a man whom he had last seen as a St. Anselm's undergraduate — one MacNiell, a handsome rowdy young Irishman, supposed to be clever, and decidedly popular in the college. As he stood looking at him, puzzled by the difference between the old impression and the new, suddenly the man's story flashed across him; he remembered some disgraceful escapade — an expulsion.

'You came for the funeral, of course?' said the other, his face flushing consciously.

'Yes — and you too?'

The man turned away, and something in his silence led Robert to stroll on beside him to the open end of the platform.

'I have lost my only friend,' MacNiell said at last hoarsely. 'He took me up when my own father would have nothing to say to me. He found me work; he wrote to me; for years he stood between me and perdition. I am just going out to a post in New Zealand he got for me, and next week before I sail — I — I — am to be married — and he was to be there. He was so pleased — he had seen her.'

It was one story out of a hundred like it, as Robert knew very well. They talked for a few minutes, then the train loomed in the distance.

'He saved you,' said Robert, holding out his hand, 'and at a dark moment in my own life I owed him

everything. There is nothing we can do for him in return but — to remember him! Write to me, if you can or will, from New Zealand, for his sake.'

A few seconds later the train sped past the bare little cemetery, which lay just beyond the line. Robert bent forward. In the pale yellow glow of the evening he could distinguish the grave, the mound of gravel, the planks, and some figures moving beside it. He strained his eyes till he could see no more, his heart full of veneration, of memory, of prayer. In himself life seemed so restless and combative. Surely he, more than others, had need of the lofty lessons of death!

## CHAPTER XLV

In the weeks which followed — weeks often of mental and physical depression, caused by his sense of personal loss and by the influence of an overworked state he could not be got to admit — Elsmere owed much to Hugh Flaxman's cheery sympathetic temper, and became more attached to him than ever, and more ready than ever, should the Fates deem it so, to welcome him as a brother-in-law. However, the Fates for the moment seemed to have borrowed a leaf from Langham's book, and did not apparently know their own minds. It says volumes for Hugh Flaxman's general capacities as a human being that at this period he should have had any attention to give to a friend, his position as a lover was so dubious and difficult.

After the evening at the Workmen's Club, and as a result of further meditation, he had greatly developed the tactics first adopted on that occasion. He had beaten a masterly retreat, and Rose Leyburn was troubled with him no more.

The result was that a certain brilliant young person was soon sharply conscious of a sudden drop in the pleasures of living. Mr. Flaxman had been the Leyburns' most constant and entertaining visitor. During the whole of May he paid one formal call in Lerwick Gardens, and was then entertained *tête-à-tête* by Mrs. Leyburn, to Rose's intense subsequent annoyance,

who knew perfectly well that her mother was incapable of chattering about anything but her daughters.

He still sent flowers, but they came from his head gardener, addressed to Mrs. Leyburn. Agnes put them in water; and Rose never gave them a look. Rose went to Lady Helen's because Lady Helen made her, and was much too engaging a creature to be rebuffed; but, however merry and protracted the teas in those scented rooms might be, Mr. Flaxman's step on the stairs, and Mr. Flaxman's hand on the curtain over the door, till now the feature in the entertainment most to be counted on, were, generally speaking, conspicuously absent.

He and the Leyburns met, of course; for their list of common friends was now considerable; but Agnes, reporting matters to Catherine, could only say that each of these occasions left Rose more irritable, and more inclined to say biting things as to the foolish ways in which society takes its pleasures.

Rose certainly was irritable, and at times, Agnes thought, depressed. But as usual she was unapproachable about her own affairs, and the state of her mind could only be somewhat dolefully gathered from the fact that she was much less unwilling to go back to Burwood this summer than had ever been known before.

Meanwhile, Mr. Flaxman left certain other people in no doubt as to his intentions.

'My dear aunt,' he said calmly to Lady Charlotte, 'I mean to marry Miss Leyburn if I can at any time persuade her to have me. So much you may take as fixed, and it will be quite waste of breath on your part

to quote dukes to me. But the other factor in the problem is by no means fixed. Miss Leyburn won't have me at present, and as for the future I have most salutary qualms.'

'Hugh!' interrupted Lady Charlotte angrily, 'as if you had n't had the mothers of London at your feet for years!'

Lady Charlotte was in a most variable frame of mind; one day hoping devoutly that the Langham affair might prove lasting enough in its effects to tire Hugh out; the next, outraged that a silly girl should waste a thought on such a creature, while Hugh was in her way; at one time angry that an insignificant chit of a schoolmaster's daughter should apparently care so little to be the Duke of Sedbergh's niece, and should even dare to allow herself the luxury of snubbing a Flaxman; at another, utterly sceptical as to any lasting obduracy on the chit's part. The girl was clearly anxious not to fall too easily, but as to final refusal — pshaw! And it made her mad that Hugh would hold himself so cheap.

Meanwhile, Mr. Flaxman felt himself in no way called upon to answer that remark of his aunt's we have recorded.

'I have qualms,' he repeated, 'but I mean to do all I know, and you and Helen must help me.'

Lady Charlotte crossed her hands before her.

'I may be a Liberal and a lion-hunter,' she said firmly, 'but I have still conscience enough left not to aid and abet my nephew in throwing himself away.'

She had nearly slipped in 'again'; but just saved herself.

'Your conscience is all a matter of the Duke,' he told her. 'Well, if you won't help me, then Helen and I will have to arrange it by ourselves.'

But this did not suit Lady Charlotte at all. She had always played the part of earthly providence to this particular nephew, and it was abominable to her that the wretch, having refused for ten years to provide her with a love-affair to manage, should now manage one for himself in spite of her.

'You are such an arbitrary creature!' she said fretfully; 'you prance about the world like Don Quixote, and expect me to play Sancho without a murmur.'

'How many drubbings have I brought you yet?' he asked her, laughing. He was really very fond of her. 'It is true there is a point of likeness; I won't take your advice. But then why don't you give me better? It is strange,' he added, musing; 'women talk to us about love as if we were too gross to understand it; and when they come to business, and they're not in it themselves, they show the temper of attorneys.'

'Love!' cried Lady Charlotte, nettled. 'Do you mean to tell me, Hugh, that you are really, *seriously* in love with that girl?'

'Well, I only know,' he said, thrusting his hands far into his pockets, 'that unless things mend I shall go out to California in the autumn and try ranching.'

Lady Charlotte burst into an angry laugh. He stood opposite to her, with his orchid in his buttonhole, himself the fine flower of civilisation. Ranching, indeed! However, he had done so many odd things in his life, that, as she knew, it was never quite safe to decline to take him seriously, and he looked at her

now so defiantly, his clear greenish eyes so wide open and alert, that her will began to waver under the pressure of his.

'What do you want me to do, sir?'

His glance relaxed at once, and he laughingly explained to her that what he asked of her was to keep the prey in sight.

'I can do nothing for myself at present,' he said; 'I get on her nerves. She was in love with that black-haired *enfant du siècle,* — or rather, she prefers to assume that she was, — and I have n't given her time to forget him. A serious blunder, and I deserve to suffer for it. Very well, then, I retire, and I ask you and Helen to keep watch. Don't let her go. Make yourselves nice to her; and, in fact, spoil me a little now I am on the highroad to forty, as you used to spoil me at fourteen.'

Mr. Flaxman sat down by his aunt and kissed her hand, after which Lady Charlotte was as wax before him. 'Thank heaven,' she reflected, 'in ten days the Duke and all of them go out of town.' Retribution, therefore, for wrong-doing would be tardy if wrong-doing there must be. She could but ruefully reflect that after all the girl was beautiful and gifted; moreover, if Hugh would force her to befriend him in this criminality, there might be a certain joy in thereby vindicating those Liberal principles of hers, in which a scornful family had always refused to believe. So, being driven into it, she would fain have done it boldly and with a dash. But she could not rid her mind of the Duke, and her performance all through, as a matter of fact, was blundering.

However, she was for the time very gracious to Rose, being in truth really fond of her; and Rose, however high she might hold her little head, could find no excuse for quarrelling either with her or Lady Helen.

Towards the middle of June there was a grand ball given by Lady Fauntleroy at Fauntleroy House, to which the two Miss Leyburns, by Lady Helen's machinations, were invited. It was to be one of the events of the season, and when the cards arrived 'to have the honour of meeting their Royal Highnesses,' etc., etc., Mrs. Leyburn, good soul, gazed at them with eyes which grew a little moist under her spectacles. She wished Richard could have seen the girls dressed, 'just once.' But Rose treated the cards with no sort of tenderness. 'If one could but put them up to auction,' she said flippantly, holding them up, 'how many German opera tickets I should get for nothing! I don't know what Agnes feels. As for me, I have neither nerve enough for the people, nor money enough for the toilette.'

However, with eleven o'clock Lady Helen ran in, a fresh vision of blue and white, to suggest certain dresses for the sisters which had occurred to her in the visions of the night, 'original, adorable, — cost, a mere nothing!'

'My harpy,' she remarked, alluding to her dressmaker, 'would ruin you over them, of course. Your maid' — the Leyburns possessed a remarkably clever one — 'will make them divinely for twopence-halfpenny. Listen.'

Rose listened; her eye kindled; the maid was summoned; and the invitation accepted in Agnes's neatest

hand. Even Catherine was roused during the following ten days to a smiling indulgent interest in the concerns of the workroom.

The evening came, and Lady Helen fetched the sisters in her carriage. The ball was a magnificent affair. The house was one of historical interest and importance, and all that the ingenuity of the present could do to give fresh life and gaiety to the pillared rooms, the carved galleries and stately staircases of the past, had been done. The ball-room, lined with Vandycks and Lelys, glowed softly with electric light; the picture gallery had been banked with flowers and carpeted with red, and the beautiful dresses of the women trailed up and down it, challenging the satins of the Netschers and the Terburgs on the walls.

Rose's card was soon full to overflowing. The young men present were of the smartest, and would not willingly have bowed the knee to a nobody, however pretty. But Lady Helen's devotion, the girl's reputation as a musician, and her little nonchalant disdainful ways, gave her a kind of prestige, which made her, for the time being at any rate, the equal of anybody. Petitioners came and went away empty. Royalty was introduced, and smiled both upon the beauty and the beauty's delicate and becoming dress; and still Rose, though a good deal more flushed and erect than usual, and though flesh and blood could not resist the contagious pleasure which glistened even in the eyes of that sage Agnes, was more than half-inclined to say, with the Preacher, that all was vanity.

Presently, as she stood waiting with her hand on her partner's arm before gliding into a waltz, she saw

Mr. Flaxman opposite to her, and with him a young *débutante* in white tulle — a thin, pretty, undeveloped creature, whose sharp elbows and timid movements, together with the blushing enjoyment glowing so frankly from her face, pointed her out as the schoolgirl of sweet seventeen, just emancipated, and trying her wings.

'Ah, there is Lady Florence!' said her partner, a handsome young Hussar. 'This ball is in her honour, you know. She comes out to-night. What, another cousin? Really she keeps too much in the family!'

'Is Mr. Flaxman a cousin?'

The young man replied that he was, and then, in the intervals of waltzing, went on to explain to her the relationships of many of the people present, till the whole gorgeous affair began to seem to Rose a mere family party. Mr. Flaxman was of it. She was not.

'Why am I here?' the little Jacobin said to herself fiercely as she waltzed; 'it is foolish, unprofitable. I do not belong to them, nor they to me!'

'Miss Leyburn! charmed to see you!' cried Lady Charlotte, stopping her; and then, in a loud whisper in her ear, 'Never saw you look better. Your taste, or Helen's, that dress? The roses — exquisite!'

Rose dropped her a little mock curtsey and whirled on again.

'*Lady Florences* are always well dressed,' thought the child angrily; 'and who notices it?'

Another turn brought them against Mr. Flaxman and his partner. Mr. Flaxman came at once to greet her with smiling courtesy.

'I have a Cambridge friend to introduce to you — a beautiful youth. Shall I find you by Helen? Now, Lady Florence, patience a moment. That corner is too crowded. How good that last turn was!'

And bending with a sort of kind chivalry over his partner, who looked at him with the eyes of a joyous excited child, he led her away. Five minutes later Rose, standing flushed by Lady Helen, saw him coming again towards her, ushering a tall blue-eyed youth, whom he introduced to her as 'Lord Waynflete.' The handsome boy looked at her with a boy's open admiration, and beguiled her of a supper dance, while a group standing near, a mother and three daughters, stood watching with cold eyes and expressions which said plainly to the initiated that mere beauty was receiving a ridiculous amount of attention.

'I would n't have given it him, but it is *rude* — it is *bad manners*, not even to ask!' the supposed victress was saying to herself, with quivering lips, her eyes following not the Trinity freshman, who was their latest captive, but an older man's well-knit figure, and a head on which the fair hair was already growing scantily, receding a little from the fine intellectual brows.

An hour later she was again standing by Lady Helen, waiting for a partner, when she saw two persons crossing the room, which was just beginning to fill again for dancing, towards them. One was Mr. Flaxman, the other was a small wrinkled old man, who leant upon his arm, displaying the ribbon of the Garter as he walked.

'Dear me,' said Lady Helen, a little fluttered, 'here is my Uncle Sedbergh. I thought they had left town.'

The pair approached, and the old Duke bowed over his niece's hand with the manners of a past generation.

'I made Hugh give me an arm,' he said quaveringly. 'These floors are homicidal. If I come down on them I shall bring an action.'

'I thought you had all left town?' said Lady Helen.

'Who can make plans with a Government in power pledged to every sort of villainy and public plunder?' said the old man testily. 'I suppose Varley's there to-night, helping to vote away my property and Fauntleroy's.'

'Some of his own too, if you please!' said Lady Helen, smiling. 'Yes, I suppose he is waiting for the division, or he would be here.'

'I wonder why Providence blessed *me* with such a Radical crew of relations?' remarked the Duke. 'Hugh is a regular Communist. I never heard such arguments in my life. And as for any idea of standing by his order—' The old man shook his bald head and shrugged his small shoulders with almost French vivacity. He had been handsome once, and delicately featured, but now the left eye drooped, and the face had a strong look of peevishness and ill-health.

'Uncle,' interposed Lady Helen, 'let me introduce you to my two great friends, Miss Leyburn, Miss Rose Leyburn.'

The Duke bowed, looked at them through a pair of sharp eyes, seemed to cogitate inwardly whether such a name had ever been known to him, and turned to his nephew.

'Get me out of this, Hugh, and I shall be obliged to you. Young people may risk it, but if *I* broke I should n't mend.'

And still grumbling audibly about the floor, he hobbled off towards the picture gallery. Mr. Flaxman had only time for a smiling backward glance at Rose.

'Have you given my pretty boy a dance?'

'Yes,' she said, but with as much stiffness as she might have shown to his uncle.

'That's over,' said Lady Helen, with relief. 'My uncle hardly meets any of us now without a spar. He has never forgiven my father for going over to the Liberals. And then he thinks we none of us consult him enough. No more we do — except Aunt Charlotte. *She's* afraid of him!'

'Lady Charlotte afraid!' echoed Rose.

'Odd, is n't it? The Duke avenges a good many victims on her, if they only knew!'

Lady Helen was called away, and Rose was left standing, wondering what had happened to her partner.

Opposite, Mr. Flaxman was pushing through a doorway, and Lady Florence was again on his arm. At the same time she became conscious of a morsel of chaperons' conversation such as, by the kind contrivances of fate, a girl is tolerably sure to hear under similar circumstances.

The *débutante's* good looks, Hugh Flaxman's apparent susceptibility to them, the possibility of results, and the satisfactory disposition of the family goods and chattels that would be brought about by such a match, the opportunity it would offer the man, too,

of rehabilitating himself socially after his first matrimonial escapade — Rose caught fragments of all these topics as they were discussed by two old ladies, presumably also of the family 'ring,' who gossiped behind her with more gusto than discretion. Highmindedness, of course, told her to move away; something else held her fast, till her partner came up for her.

Then she floated away into the whirlwind of waltzers. But as she moved round the room on her partner's arm, her delicate half-scornful grace attracting look after look, the soul within was all aflame — aflame against the serried ranks and phalanxes of this unfamiliar, hostile world! She had just been reading Trevelyan's 'Life of Fox' aloud to her mother, who liked occasionally to flavour her knitting with literature, and she began now to revolve a passage from it, describing the upper class of the last century, which had struck that morning on her quick retentive memory: '"*A few thousand people who thought that the world was made for them*" — did it not run so? — "*and that all outside their own fraternity were unworthy of notice or criticism, bestowed upon each other an amount of attention quite inconceivable. . . . Within the charmed precincts there prevailed an easy and natural mode of intercourse, in some respects singularly delightful.*" Such, for instance, as the Duke of Sedbergh was master of! Well, it was worth while, perhaps, to have gained an experience, even at the expense of certain illusions, as to the manners of dukes, and — and — as to the constancy of friends. But never again — never again!' said the impetuous inner voice. 'I have my world — they theirs!'

But why so strong a flood of bitterness against our poor upper class, so well intentioned for all its occasional lack of lucidity, should have arisen in so young a breast it is a little difficult for the most conscientious biographer to explain. She had partners to her heart's desire; young Lord Waynflete used his utmost arts upon her to persuade her that at least half a dozen numbers of the regular programme were extras and therefore at his disposal; and when royalty supped, it was graciously pleased to ordain that Lady Helen and her two companions should sup behind the same folding-doors as itself, while beyond these doors surged the inferior crowd of persons who had been specially invited to 'meet their Royal Highnesses,' and had so far been held worthy neither to dance nor to eat in the same room with them. But in vain. Rose still felt herself, for all her laughing outward *insouciance*, a poor, bruised, helpless chattel, trodden under the heel of a world which was intolerably powerful, rich, and self-satisfied, the odious product of 'family arrangements.'

Mr. Flaxman sat far away at the same royal table as herself. Beside him was the thin tall *débutante*. 'She is like one of the Gainsborough princesses,' thought Rose, studying her with involuntary admiration. 'Of course it is all plain. He will get everything he wants, and a Lady Florence into the bargain. Radical, indeed! What nonsense!'

Then it startled her to find that the eyes of Lady Florence's neighbour were, as it seemed, on herself; or was he merely nodding to Lady Helen? — and she began immediately to give a smiling attention to the man on her left.

An hour later she and Agnes and Lady Helen were descending the great staircase on their way to their carriage. The morning light was flooding through the chinks of the carefully veiled windows; Lady Helen was yawning behind her tiny white hand, her eyes nearly asleep. But the two sisters, who had not been up till three, on four preceding nights, like their chaperon, were still almost as fresh as the flowers massed in the hall below.

'Ah, there is Hugh!' cried Lady Helen. 'How I hope he has found the carriage!'

At that moment Rose slipped on a spray of gardenia, which had dropped from the bouquet of some predecessor. To prevent herself from falling downstairs, she caught hold of the stem of a brazen chandelier fixed in the balustrade. It saved her, but she gave her arm a most painful wrench, and leant limp and white against the railing of the stairs. Lady Helen turned at Agnes's exclamation, but before she could speak, as it seemed, Mr. Flaxman, who had been standing talking just below them, was on the stairs.

'You have hurt your arm? Don't speak — take mine. Let me get you downstairs out of the crush.'

She was too far gone to resist, and when she was mistress of herself again she found herself in the library with some water in her hand which Mr. Flaxman had just put there.

'Is it the playing hand?' said Lady Helen anxiously.

'No,' said Rose, trying to laugh; 'the bowing elbow.' And she raised it, but with a contortion of pain.

'Don't raise it,' he said peremptorily. 'We will have a doctor here in a moment, and have it bandaged.'

He disappeared. Rose tried to sit up, seized with a frantic longing to disobey him, and get off before he returned. Stinging the girl's mind was the sense that it might all perfectly well seem to him a planned appeal to his pity.

'Agnes, help me up,' she said, with a little involuntary groan; 'I shall be better at home.'

But both Lady Helen and Agnes laughed her to scorn, and she lay back once more overwhelmed by fatigue and faintness. A few more minutes, and a doctor appeared, caught by good luck in the next street. He pronounced it a severe muscular strain, but nothing more; applied a lotion and improvised a sling. Rose consulted him anxiously as to the interference with her playing.

'A week,' he said; 'no more, if you are careful.'

Her pale face brightened. Her art had seemed specially dear to her of late.

'Hugh!' called Lady Helen, going to the door. '*Now* we are ready for the carriage.'

Rose leaning on Agnes walked out into the hall. They found him there waiting.

'The carriage is here,' he said, bending towards her with a look and tone which so stirred the fluttered nerves, that the sense of faintness stole back upon her. 'Let me take you to it.'

'Thank you,' she said coldly, but by a superhuman effort; 'my sister's help is quite enough.'

He followed them with Lady Helen. At the carriage

door the sisters hesitated a moment. Rose was helpless without a right hand. A little imperative movement from behind displaced Agnes, and Rose felt herself hoisted in by a strong arm. She sank into the farther corner. The glow of the dawn caught her white delicate features, the curls on her temples, all the silken confusion of her dress. Hugh Flaxman put in Agnes and his sister, said something to Agnes about coming to inquire, and raised his hat. Rose caught the quick force and intensity of his eyes, and then closed her own, lost in a languid swoon of pain, memory, and resentful wonder.

Flaxman walked away down Park Lane through the chill morning quietness, the gathering light striking over the houses beside him on to the misty stretches of the Park. His hat was over his eyes, his hands thrust into his pockets; a close observer would have noticed a certain trembling of the lips. It was but a few seconds since her young warm beauty had been for an instant in his arms; his whole being was shaken by it, and by that last look of hers. 'Have I gone too far?' he asked himself anxiously. 'Is it divinely true — *already* — that she resents being left to herself? Oh, little rebel! You tried your best not to let me see. But you *were* angry, you were! Now, then, how to proceed? She is all fire, all character; I rejoice in it. She will give me trouble; so much the better. Poor little hurt thing! the fight is only beginning; but I will make her do penance some day for all that loftiness to-night.'

If these reflexions betray to the reader a certain masterful note of confidence in Mr. Flaxman's mind,

he will perhaps find small cause to regret that Rose *did* give him a great deal of trouble.

Nothing could have been more 'salutary,' to use his own word, than the dance she led him during the next three weeks. She provoked him indeed at moments so much that he was a hundred times on the point of trying to seize his kingdom of heaven by violence, of throwing himself upon her with a tempest shock of reproach and appeal. But some secret instinct restrained him. She was wilful, she was capricious; she had a real and powerful distraction in her art. He must be patient and risk nothing.

He suspected, too, what was the truth — that Lady Charlotte was doing harm. Rose, indeed, had grown so touchingly sensitive that she found offence in almost every word of Lady Charlotte's about her nephew. Why should the apparently casual remarks of the aunt bear so constantly on the subject of the nephew's social importance? Rose vowed to herself that she needed no reminder of that station whereunto it had pleased God to call her, and that Lady Charlotte might spare herself all those anxieties and reluctances which the girl's quick sense detected, in spite of the invitations so freely showered on Lerwick Gardens.

The end of it all was that Hugh Flaxman found himself again driven into a corner. At the bottom of him was still a confidence that would not yield. Was it possible that he had ever given her some tiny involuntary glimpse of it, and that but for that glimpse she would have let him make his peace much more easily? At any rate, now he felt himself at the end of his resources.

*Mrs. Ward's House in Russell Square*

'I must change the venue,' he said to himself; 'decidedly I must change the venue.'

So by the end of June he had accepted an invitation to fish in Norway with a friend, and was gone. Rose received the news with a callousness which made even Lady Helen want to shake her.

On the eve of his journey, however, Hugh Flaxman had at last confessed himself to Catherine and Robert. His obvious plight made any further scruples on their part futile, and what they had they gave him in the way of sympathy. Also Robert, gathering that he already knew much, and without betraying any confidence of Rose's, gave him a hint or two on the subject of Langham. But more not the friendliest mortal could do for him, and Flaxman went off into exile announcing to a mocking Elsmere that he should sit pensive on the banks of Norwegian rivers till fortune had had time to change.

# BOOK VII

## GAIN AND LOSS

## CHAPTER XLVI

A HOT July had well begun, but still Elsmere was toiling on in Elgood Street, and could not persuade himself to think of a holiday. Catherine and the child he had driven away more than once, but the claims upon himself were becoming so absorbing he did not know how to go even for a few weeks. There were certain individuals in particular who depended on him from day to day. One was Charles Richards's widow. The poor desperate creature had put herself abjectly into Elsmere's hands. He had sent her to an asylum, where she had been kindly and skilfully treated, and after six weeks' abstinence she had just returned to her children, and was being watched by himself and a competent woman neighbour, whom he had succeeded in interesting in the case.

Another was a young 'secret springer,' to use the mysterious terms of the trade — Robson by name — whom Elsmere had originally known as a clever workman belonging to the watch-making colony, and a diligent attendant from the beginning on the Sunday lectures. He was now too ill to leave his lodgings, and his sickly pessimist personality had established a special hold on Robert. He was dying of tumour in the throat, and had become a torment to himself and a disgust to others. There was a spark of wayward genius in him, however, which enabled him to bear his ills with a mixture of savage humour and clear-eyed despair.

In general outlook he was much akin to the author of the 'City of Dreadful Night,' whose poems he read; the loathsome spectacles of London had filled him with a kind of sombre energy of revolt against all that is. And now that he could only work intermittently, he would sit brooding for hours, startling the fellow-workmen who came in to see him with ghastly Heine-like jokes on his own hideous disease, living no one exactly knew how, though it was supposed on supplies sent him by a shopkeeper uncle in the country, and constantly on the verge, as all his acquaintances felt, of some ingenious expedient or other for putting an end to himself and his troubles. He was unmarried, and a misogynist to boot. No woman willingly went near him, and he tended himself. How Robert had gained any hold upon him no one could guess. But from the moment when Elsmere, struck in the lecture-room by the pallid ugly face and swathed neck, began regularly to go and see him, the elder man felt instinctively that virtue had gone out of him, and that in some subtle way yet another life had become pitifully, silently dependent on his own stock of strength and comfort.

His lecturing and teaching work also was becoming more and more the instrument of far-reaching change, and therefore more and more difficult to leave. The thoughts of God, the image of Jesus, which were active and fruitful in his own mind, had been gradually passing from the one into the many, and Robert watched the sacred transforming emotion, once nurtured at his own heart, now working among the crowd of men and women his fiery speech had gathered round

him, with a trembling joy, a humble prostration of the soul before the Eternal Truth, no words can fitly describe. With an ever-increasing detachment of mind from the objects of self and sense, he felt himself a tool in the Great Workman's hand. 'Accomplish Thy purposes in me,' was the cry of his whole heart and life; 'use me to the utmost; spend every faculty I have, "O Thou who mouldest men"!'

But in the end his work itself drove him away. A certain memorable Saturday evening brought it about. It had been his custom of late to spend an occasional evening hour after his night-school work in the North R—— Club, of which he was now by invitation a member. Here, in one of the inner rooms, he would stand against the mantelpiece chatting, smoking often with the men. Everything came up in turn to be discussed; and Robert was at least as ready to learn from the practical workers about him as to teach. But in general these informal talks and debates became the supplement of the Sunday lectures. Here he met Andrews and the Secularist crew face to face; here he grappled in Socratic fashion with objections and difficulties, throwing into the task all his charm and all his knowledge, a man at once of no pretensions and of unfailing natural dignity. Nothing, so far, had served his cause and his influence so well as these moments of free discursive intercourse. The mere orator, the mere talker, indeed, would never have gained any permanent hold; but the life behind gave weight to every acute or eloquent word, and importance even to those mere sallies of a boyish enthusiasm which were still common enough in him.

He had already visited the club once during the week preceding this Saturday. On both occasions there was much talk of the growing popularity and efficiency of the Elgood Street work, of the numbers attending the lectures, the story-telling, the Sunday-school, and of the way in which the attractions of it had spread into other quarters of the parish, exciting there, especially among the clergy of St. Wilfrid's, an anxious and critical attention. The conversation on Saturday night, however, took a turn of its own. Robert felt in it a new and curious note of *responsibility*. The men present were evidently beginning to regard the work as *their* work also, and its success as their interest. It was perfectly natural, for not only had most of them been his supporters and hearers from the beginning, but some of them were now actually teaching in the night-school or helping in the various branches of the large and overflowing boys' club. He listened to them for a while in his favourite attitude, leaning against the mantelpiece, throwing in a word or two now and then as to how this or that part of the work might be amended or expanded. Then suddenly a kind of inspiration seemed to pass from them to him. Bending forward as the talk dropped a moment, he asked them, with an accent more emphatic than usual, whether in view of this collaboration of theirs, which was becoming more valuable to him and his original helpers every week, it was not time for a new departure.

'Suppose I drop my dictatorship,' he said, 'suppose we set up parliamentary government, are you ready to take your share? Are you ready to combine, to

commit yourselves? Are you ready for an effort to turn this work into something lasting and organic?'

The men gathered round him smoked on in silence for a minute. Old Macdonald, who had been sitting contentedly puffing away in a corner peculiarly his own, and dedicated to the glorification — in broad Berwickshire — of the experimental philosophers, laid down his pipe and put on his spectacles, that he might grasp the situation better. Then Lestrange, in a dry cautious way, asked Elsmere to explain himself further.

Robert began to pace up and down, talking out his thought, his eye kindling.

But in a minute or two he stopped abruptly, with one of those striking rapid gestures characteristic of him.

'But no mere social and educational body, mind you!' and his bright commanding look swept round the circle. 'A good thing surely, "yet is there better than it." The real difficulty of every social effort — you know it and I know it — lies, not in the planning of the work, but in the kindling of will and passion enough to carry it *through*. And that can only be done by religion — by faith.'

He went back to his old leaning attitude, his hands behind him. The men gazed at him — at the slim figure, the transparent changing face — with a kind of fascination, but were still silent, till Macdonald said slowly, taking off his glasses again and clearing his throat, —

'You'll be aboot starrtin' a new church, I'm thinkin', Misther Elsmere?'

'If you like,' said Robert impetuously. 'I have no fear of the great words. You can do nothing by despising the past and its products; you can also do nothing by being too much afraid of them, by letting them choke and stifle your own life. Let the new wine have its new bottles if it must, and never mind words. Be content to be a new "sect," "conventicle," or what not, so long as you feel that you are *something* with a life and purpose of its own, in this tangle of a world.'

Again he paused with knit brows, thinking. Lestrange sat with his elbows on his knees studying him, the spare grey hair brushed back tightly from the bony face, on the lips the slightest Voltairean smile. Perhaps it was the coolness of his look which insensibly influenced Robert's next words.

'However, I don't imagine we should call ourselves a church! Something much humbler will do, if you choose ever to make anything of these suggestions of mine. "Association," "society," "brotherhood," what you will! But always, if I can persuade you, with something in the name, and everything in the body itself, to show that for the members of it life rests still, as all life worth having has everywhere rested, on *trust* and *memory!* — *trust* in the God of experience and history; *memory* of that God's work in man, by which alone we know Him and can approach Him. Well, of that work — I have tried to prove it to you a thousand times — Jesus of Nazareth has become to *us*, by the evolution of circumstance, the most moving, the most efficacious of all types and epitomes. We have made our protest — we are daily making it — in the

face of society, against the fictions and overgrowths which at the present time are excluding him more and more from human love. But now, suppose we turn our backs on negation, and have done with mere denial! Suppose we throw all our energies into the practical building of a new house of faith, the gathering and organising of a new Company of Jesus!'

Other men had been stealing in while he was speaking. The little room was nearly full. It was strange, the contrast between the squalid modernness of the scene, with its incongruous sights and sounds, the club-room, painted in various hideous shades of cinnamon and green, the smoke, the lines and groups of workingmen in every sort of working dress, the occasional rumbling of huge waggons past the window, the click of glasses and cups in the refreshment bar outside, and this stir of spiritual passion which any competent observer might have felt sweeping through the little crowd as Robert spoke, connecting what was passing there with all that is sacred and beautiful in the history of the world.

After another silence a young fellow, in a shabby velvet coat, stood up. He was commonly known among his fellow-potters as 'the hartist,' because of his long hair, his little affectations of dress, and his æsthetic susceptibilities generally. The wits of the club made him their target, but the teasing of him that went on was more or less tempered by the knowledge that in his own queer way he had brought up and educated two young sisters almost from infancy, and that his sweetheart had been killed before his eyes a year before in a railway accident.

'I dun know,' he said in a high treble voice, 'I dun know whether I speak for anybody but myself — very likely not; but what I *do* know,' and he raised his right hand and shook it with a gesture of curious felicity, 'is this — what Mr. Elsmere starts I'll join; where he goes I'll go; what's good enough for him's good enough for me. He's put a new heart and a new stomach into me, and what I've got he shall have, whenever it pleases 'im to call for it! So if he wants to run a new thing against or alongside the old uns, and he wants me to help him with it — I don't know as I'm very clear what he's driving at, nor what good I can do 'im — but when Tom Wheeler's asked for he'll be there!'

A deep murmur, rising almost into a shout of assent, ran through the little assembly. Robert bent forward, his eye glistening, a moved acknowledgement in his look and gesture. But in reality a pang ran through the fiery soul. It was 'the personal estimate,' after all, that was shaping their future and his, and the idealist was up in arms for his idea, sublimely jealous lest any mere personal fancy should usurp its power and place.

A certain amount of desultory debate followed as to the possible outlines of a possible organisation, and as to the observances which might be devised to mark its religious character. As it flowed on the atmosphere grew more and more electric. A new passion, though still timid and awestruck, seemed to shine from the looks of the men standing or sitting round the central figure. Even Lestrange lost his smile under the pressure of that strange subdued expectancy about him;

and when Robert walked homeward, about midnight, there weighed upon him an almost awful sense of crisis, of an expanding future.

He let himself in softly and went into his study. There he sank into a chair and fainted. He was probably not unconscious very long, but after he had struggled back to his senses, and was lying stretched on the sofa among the books with which it was littered, the solitary candle in the big room throwing weird shadows about him, a moment of black depression overtook him. It was desolate and terrible, like a prescience of death. How was it he had come to feel so ill? Suddenly, as he looked back over the preceding weeks, the physical weakness and disturbance which had marked them, and which he had struggled through, paying as little heed as possible, took shape, spectre-like, in his mind.

And at the same moment a passionate rebellion against weakness and disablement arose in him. He sat up dizzily, his head in his hands.

'Rest — strength,' he said to himself, with strong inner resolve, 'for the work's sake!'

He dragged himself up to bed and said nothing to Catherine till the morning. Then, with boyish brightness, he asked her to take him and the babe off without delay to the Norman coast, vowing that he would lounge and idle for six whole weeks if she would let him. Shocked by his looks, she gradually got from him the story of the night before. As he told it, his swoon was a mere untoward incident and hindrance in a spiritual drama, the thrill of which, while he described it, passed even to her. The contrast, however,

between the strong hopes she felt pulsing through him, and his air of fragility and exhaustion, seemed to melt the heart within her, and make her whole being, she hardly knew why, one sensitive dread. She sat beside him, her head laid against his shoulder, oppressed by a strange and desolate sense of her comparatively small share in this ardent life. In spite of his tenderness and devotion, she felt often as though he were no longer hers — as though a craving hungry world, whose needs were all dark and unintelligible to her, were asking him from her, claiming to use as roughly and prodigally as it pleased the quick mind and delicate frame.

As to the schemes developing round him, she could not take them in whether for protest or sympathy. She could think only of where to go, what doctor to consult, how she could persuade him to stay away long enough.

There was little surprise in Elgood Street when Elsmere announced that he must go off for a while. He so announced it that everybody who heard him understood that his temporary withdrawal was to be the mere preparation for a great effort — the vigil before the tourney; and the eager friendliness with which he was met sent him off in good heart.

Three or four days later he, Catherine, and Mary were at Petites Dalles, a little place on the Norman coast, near Fécamp, with which he had first made acquaintance years before, when he was at Oxford.

Here all that in London had been oppressive in the August heat suffered 'a sea change,' and became so

much matter for physical delight. It was fiercely hot indeed. Every morning, between five and six o'clock, Catherine would stand by the little white-veiled window, in the dewy silence, to watch the eastern shadows spreading sharply already into a blazing world of sun, and see the tall poplar just outside shooting into a quivering changeless depth of blue. Then, as early as possible, they would sally forth before the glare became unbearable. The first event of the day was always Mary's bath, which gradually became a spectacle for the whole beach, so ingenious were the blandishments of the father who wooed her into the warm sandy shallows, and so beguiling the glee and pluck of the two-year-old English *bébé*. By eleven the heat out of doors grew intolerable, and they would stroll back — father and mother and trailing child — past the hotels on the *plage*, along the irregular village lane, to the little house where they had established themselves, with Mary's nurse and a French *bonne* to look after them; would find the green wooden shutters drawn close; the *déjeuner* waiting for them in the cool bare room; and the scent of the coffee penetrating from the kitchen, where the two maids kept up a dumb but perpetual warfare. Then afterwards Mary, emerging from her sunbonnet, would be tumbled into her white bed upstairs, and lie, a flushed image of sleep, till the patter of her little feet on the boards which alone separated one storey from the other, warned mother and nurse that an imp of mischief was let loose again. Meanwhile Robert, in the carpetless salon, would lie back in the rickety armchair which was its only luxury, lazily dozing and

dreaming, Balzac, perhaps, in his hand, but quite another *comédie humaine* unrolling itself vaguely meanwhile in the contriving optimist mind.

Petites Dalles was not fashionable yet, though it aspired to be; but it could boast of a deputy, and a senator, and a professor of the Collège de France, as good as any at Etretat, a tired journalist or two, and a sprinkling of Rouen men of business. Robert soon made friends among them, *more suo*, by dint of a rough-and-ready French, spoken with the most unblushing accent imaginable, and lounged along the sands through many an amusing and sociable hour with one or other of his new acquaintances.

But by the evening husband and wife would leave the crowded beach, and mount by some tortuous dusty way on to the high plateau through which was cleft far below the wooded fissure of the village. Here they seemed to have climbed the beanstalk into a new world. The rich Normandy country lay all round them — the cornfields, the hedgeless tracts of white-flowered lucerne or crimson clover, dotted by the orchard trees which make one vast garden of the land as one sees it from a height. On the fringe of the cliff, where the soil became too thin and barren even for French cultivation, there was a wild belt, half heather, half tangled grass and flower-growth, which the English pair loved for their own special reasons. Bathed in light, cooled by the evening wind, the patches of heather glowing, the tall grasses swaying in the breeze, there were moments when its wide, careless, dusty beauty reminded them poignantly, and yet most

sweetly, of the home of their first unclouded happiness, of the Surrey commons and wildernesses.

One evening they were sitting in the warm dusk by the edge of a little dip of heather sheltered by a tuft of broom, when suddenly they heard the purring sound of the night-jar, and immediately after the bird itself lurched past them, and as it disappeared into the darkness they caught several times the characteristic click of the wing.

Catherine raised her hand and laid it on Robert's. The sudden tears dropped on to her cheeks.

'Did you hear it, Robert?'

He drew her to him. These involuntary signs of an abiding pain in her always smote him to the heart.

'I am not unhappy, Robert,' she said at last, raising her head. 'No; if you will only get well and strong. I have submitted. It is not for myself, but —'

For what then? Merely the touchingness of mortal things as such? — of youth, of hope, of memory?

Choking down a sob, she looked seaward over the curling flame-coloured waves, while he held her hand close and tenderly. No — she was not unhappy. Something, indeed, had gone for ever out of that early joy. Her life had been caught and nipped in the great inexorable wheel of things. It would go in some sense maimed to the end. But the bitter self-torturing of that first endless year was over. Love, and her husband, and the thousand subtle forces of a changing world had conquered. She would live and die steadfast to the old faiths. But her present mind and its outlook was no more the mind of her early married life than the Christian philosophy of to-day is the

Christian philosophy of the Middle Ages. She was not conscious of change, but change there was. She had, in fact, undergone that dissociation of the moral judgement from a special series of religious formulæ which is the crucial, the epoch-making fact of our day. 'Unbelief,' says the orthodox preacher, 'is sin, and implies it': and while he speaks, the saint in the unbeliever gently smiles down his argument, and suddenly, in the rebel of yesterday men see the rightful heir of to-morrow.

## CHAPTER XLVII

MEANWHILE the Leyburns were at Burwood again. Rose's summer, indeed, was much varied by visits to country houses — many of them belonging to friends and acquaintances of the Flaxman family — by concerts, and the demands of several new and exciting artistic friendships. But she was seldom loth to come back to the little bare valley and the grey-walled house. Even the rain which poured down in August, quite unabashed by any consciousness of fine weather elsewhere, was not as intolerable to her as in past days.

The girl was not herself; there was visible in her not only that general softening and deepening of character which had been the consequence of her trouble in the spring, but a painful ennui she could hardly disguise, a longing for she knew not what. She was beginning to take the homage paid to her gift and her beauty with a quiet dignity, which was in no sense false modesty, but implied a certain clearness of vision, curious and disquieting in so young and dazzling a creature. And when she came home from her travels she would develop a taste for long walks, breasting the mountains in rain or sun, penetrating to their austerest solitudes alone, as though haunted by that profound saying of Obermann, 'Man is not made for enjoyment only — *la tristesse fait aussi partie de ses vastes besoins.*'

What, indeed, was it that ailed her? In her lonely moments, especially in those moments among the high

fells, beside some little tarn or streamlet, while the sheets of mist swept by her, or the great clouds dappled the spreading sides of the hills, she thought often of Langham — of that first thrill of passion which had passed through her, delusive and abortive, like one of those first thrills of spring which bring out the buds, only to provide victims for the frost. Now with her again 'a moral east wind was blowing.' The passion was gone. The thought of Langham still roused in her a pity that seemed to strain at her heart-strings. But was it really she, really this very Rose, who had rested for that one intoxicating instant on his breast? She felt a sort of bitter shame over her own shallowness of feeling. She must surely be a poor creature, else how could such a thing have befallen her and have left so little trace behind?

And then, her hand dabbling in the water, her face raised to the blind friendly mountains, she would go dreaming far afield. Little vignettes of London would come and go on the inner retina; smiles and sighs would follow one another.

*'How kind he was that time! how amusing this!'*

Or, *'How provoking he was that afternoon! how cold that evening!'*

Nothing else — the pronoun remained ambiguous.

'I want a friend!' she said to herself once as she was sitting far up in the bosom of High Fell, 'I want a friend badly. Yet my lover deserts me, and I send away my friend!'

One afternoon Mrs. Thornburgh, the vicar, and Rose were wandering round the churchyard together, enjoying a break of sunny weather after days of rain.

Mrs. Thornburgh's personal accent, so to speak, had grown perhaps a little more defined, a little more emphatic even, than when we first knew her. The vicar, on the other hand, was a trifle greyer, a trifle more submissive, as though on the whole, in the long conjugal contest of life, he was getting clearly worsted as the years went on. But the performance through which his wife was now taking him tried him exceptionally, and she only kept him to it with difficulty. She had had an attack of bronchitis in the spring, and was still somewhat delicate — a fact which to his mind gave her an unfair advantage of him. For she would make use of it to keep constantly before him ideas which he disliked, and in which he considered she took a morbid and unbecoming pleasure. The vicar was of opinion that when his latter end overtook him he should meet it on the whole as courageously as other men. But he was altogether averse to dwelling upon it, or the adjuncts of it, beforehand. Mrs. Thornburgh, however, since her illness had awoke to that inquisitive affectionate interest in these very adjuncts which many women feel. And it was extremely disagreeable to the vicar.

At the present moment she was engaged in choosing the precise spots in the little churchyard where it seemed to her it would be pleasant to rest. There was one corner in particular which attracted her, and she stood now looking at it with measuring eyes and dissatisfied mouth.

'William, I wish you would come here and help me!'

The vicar took no notice, but went on talking to Rose.

'William!' imperatively.

The vicar turned unwillingly.

'You know, William, if you would n't mind lying with your feet *that* way, there would be just room for me. But, of course, if you *will* have them the other way—' The shoulders in the old black silk mantle went up, and the grey curls shook dubiously.

The vicar's countenance showed plainly that he thought the remark worse than irrelevant.

'My dear,' he said crossly, 'I am not thinking of those things, nor do I wish to think of them. Everything has its time and place. It is close on tea, and Miss Rose says she must be going home.'

Mrs. Thornburgh again shook her head, this time with a disapproving sigh.

'You talk, William,' she said severely, 'as if you were a young man, instead of being turned sixty-six last birthday.'

And again she measured the spaces with her eye, checking the results aloud. But the vicar was obdurately deaf. He strolled on with Rose, who was chattering to him about a visit to Manchester, and the little church gate clicked behind them. Hearing it, Mrs. Thornburgh relaxed her measurements. They were only really interesting to her after all when the vicar was by. She hurried after them as fast as her short squat figure would allow, and stopped midway to make an exclamation.

'A carriage!' she said, shading her eyes with a very plump hand, 'stopping at Greybarns!'

The one road of the valley was visible from the churchyard, winding along the bottom of the shallow

green trough, for at least two miles. Greybarns was a farmhouse just beyond Burwood, about half a mile away.

Mrs. Thornburgh moved on, her matronly face aglow with interest.

'Mary Jenkinson taken ill!' she said. 'Of course, that's Dr. Baker! Well, it's to be hoped it won't be twins *this* time. But, as I told her last Sunday, "It's constitutional, my dear." I knew a woman who had three pairs! Five o'clock now. Well, about *seven* it'll be worth while sending to inquire.'

When she overtook the vicar and his companion, she began to whisper certain particulars into the ear that was not on Rose's side. The vicar, who, like Uncle Toby, was possessed of a fine natural modesty, would have preferred that his wife should refrain from whispering on these topics in Rose's presence. But he submitted lest opposition should provoke her into still more audible improprieties; and Rose walked on a step or two in front of the pair, her eyes twinkling a little. At the vicarage gate she was let off without the customary final gossip. Mrs. Thornburgh was so much occupied in the fate hanging over Mary Jenkinson that she, for once, forgot to catechise Rose as to any marriageable young men she might have come across in a recent visit to a great country house of the neighbourhood; an operation which formed the invariable pendant to any of Rose's absences.

So, with a smiling nod to them both, the girl turned homewards. As she did so she became aware of a man's figure walking along the space of road between Greybarns and Burwood, the western light behind it.

Dr. Baker? But even granting that Mrs. Jenkinson had brought him five miles on a false alarm, in the provoking manner of matrons, the shortest professional visit could not be over in this time.

She looked again, shading her eyes. She was nearing the gate of Burwood, and involuntarily slackened step. The man who was approaching, catching sight of the slim girlish figure in the broad hat and pink and white cotton dress, hurried up. The colour rushed to Rose's cheek. In another minute she and Hugh Flaxman were face to face.

She could not hide her astonishment.

'Why are you not in Scotland?' she said after she had given him her hand. 'Lady Helen told me last week she expected you in Ross-shire.'

Directly the words left her mouth she felt she had given him an opening. And why had Nature plagued her with this trick of blushing?

'Because I am here!' he said smiling, his keen dancing eyes looking down upon her. He was bronzed as she had never seen him. And never had he seemed to bring with him such an atmosphere of cool pleasant strength. 'I have slain so much since the first of July that I can slay no more. I am not like other men. The Nimrod in me is easily gorged, and goes to sleep after a while. So this is Burwood?'

He had caught her just on the little sweep leading to the gate, and now his eye swept quickly over the modest old house, with its trim garden, its overgrown porch and open casement windows. She dared not ask him again why he was there. In the properest manner she invited him 'to come in and see mamma.'

'I hope Mrs. Leyburn is better than she was in town? I shall be delighted to see her. But must you go in so soon? I left my carriage half a mile below, and have been revelling in the sun and air. I am loth to go indoors yet a while. Are you busy? Would it trouble you to put me in the way to the head of the valley? Then, if you will allow me, I will present myself later.'

Rose thought his request as little in the ordinary line of things as his appearance. But she turned and walked beside him, pointing out the crags at the head, the great sweep of High Fell, and the pass over to Ullswater, with as much *sang-froid* as she was mistress of.

He, on his side, informed her that on his way to Scotland he had bethought himself that he had never seen the Lakes, that he had stopped at Whinborough, was bent on walking over the High Fell pass to Ullswater, and making his way thence to Ambleside, Grasmere, and Keswick.

'But you are much too late to-day to get to Ullswater?' cried Rose incautiously.

'Certainly. You see my hotel,' and he pointed, smiling, to a white farmhouse standing just at the bend of the valley, where the road turned towards Whinborough. 'I persuaded the good woman there to give me a bed for the night, took my carriage a little farther, then, knowing I had friends in these parts, I came on to explore.'

Rose angrily felt her flush getting deeper and deeper.

'You are the first tourist,' she said coolly, 'who has ever stayed in Whindale.'

'Tourist! I repudiate the name. I am a worshipper at the shrine of Wordsworth and Nature. Helen and I long ago defined a tourist as a being with straps. I defy you to discover a strap about me, and I left my Murray in the railway carriage.'

He looked at her laughing. She laughed too. The infection of his strong sunny presence was irresistible. In London it had been so easy to stand on her dignity, to remember whenever he was friendly that the night before he had been distant. In these green solitudes it was not easy to be anything but natural — the child of the moment!

'You are neither more practical nor more economical than when I saw you last,' she said demurely. 'When did you leave Norway?'

They wandered on past the vicarage talking fast. Mr. Flaxman, who had been joined for a time, on his fishing tour, by Lord Waynflete, was giving her an amusing account of the susceptibility to titles shown by the primitive democrats of Norway. As they passed a gap in the vicarage hedge, laughing and chatting, Rose became aware of a window and a grey head hastily withdrawn. Mr. Flaxman was puzzled by the merry flash, instantly suppressed, that shot across her face.

Presently they reached the hamlet of High Close, and the house where Mary Backhouse died, and where her father and the poor bedridden Jim still lived. They mounted the path behind it, and plunged into the hazel plantation which had sheltered Robert and Catherine on a memorable night. But when they were through it, Rose turned to the right along a scram-

bling path leading to the top of the first great shoulder of High Fell. It was a steep climb, though a short one, and it seemed to Rose that when she had once let him help her over a rock her hand was never her own again. He kept it an almost constant prisoner on one pretext or another till they were at the top.

Then she sank down on a rock out of breath. He stood beside her, lifting his brown wideawake from his brow. The air below had been warm and relaxing. Here it played upon them both with a delicious life-giving freshness. He looked round on the great hollow bosom of the fell, the crags buttressing it on either hand, the winding greenness of the valley, the white sparkle of the river.

'It reminds me a little of Norway. The same austere and frugal beauty — the same bare valley floors. But no pines, no peaks, no fiords!'

'No!' said Rose scornfully, 'we are not Norway, and we are not Switzerland. To prevent disappointment, I may at once inform you that we have no glaciers, and that there is perhaps only one place in the district where a man who was not an idiot could succeed in killing himself.'

He looked at her, calmly smiling.

'You are angry,' he said, 'because I make comparisons. You are wholly on a wrong scent. I never saw a scene in the world that pleased me half as much as this bare valley, that grey roof' — and he pointed to Burwood among its trees — 'and this knoll of rocky ground.'

His look travelled back to her, and her eyes sank

beneath it. He threw himself down on the short grass beside her.

'It rained this morning,' she still had the spirit to murmur under her breath.

He took not the smallest heed.

'Do you know,' he said — and his voice dropped — 'can you guess at all why I am here to-day?'

'You had never seen the Lakes,' she repeated in a prim voice, her eyes still cast down, the corners of her mouth twitching. 'You stopped at Whinborough, intending to take the pass over to Ullswater, thence to make your way to Ambleside and Keswick — or was it to Keswick and Ambleside?'

She looked up innocently. But the flashing glance she met abashed her again.

'*Taquine!*' he said, 'but you shall not laugh me out of countenance. If I said all that to you just now, may I be forgiven? One purpose, one only, brought me from Norway, forbade me to go to Scotland, drew me to Whinborough, guided me up your valley — the purpose of seeing your face!'

It could not be said at that precise moment that he had attained it. Rather she seemed bent on hiding that face quite away from him. It seemed to him an age before, drawn by the magnetism of his look, her hands dropped, and she faced him, crimson, her breath fluttering a little. Then she would have spoken, but he would not let her. Very tenderly and quietly his hand possessed itself of hers as he knelt beside her.

'I have been in exile for two months — you sent me. I saw that I troubled you in London. You

thought I was pursuing you — pressing you. Your manner said "Go!" and I went. But do you think that for one day, or hour, or moment I have thought of anything else in those Norway woods but of you and of this blessed moment when I should be at your feet, as I am now?'

She trembled. Her hand seemed to leap in his. His gaze melted, enwrapped her. He bent forward. In another moment her silence would have so answered for her that his covetous arms would have stolen about her for good and all. But suddenly a kind of shiver ran through her — a shiver which was half memory, half shame. She drew back violently, covering her eyes with her hand.

'Oh no, no!' she cried, and her other hand struggled to get free, 'don't, don't talk to me so — I have a — a — confession.'

He watched her, his lips trembling a little, a smile of the most exquisite indulgence and understanding dawning in his eyes. Was she going to confess to him what he knew so well already? If he could only force her to say it on his breast.

But she held him at arm's length.

'You remember — you remember Mr. Langham?'

'Remember him!' echoed Mr. Flaxman fervently.

'That thought-reading night at Lady Charlotte's, on the way home, he spoke to me. I said I loved him. I *did* love him; I let him kiss me!'

Her flush had quite faded. He could hardly tell whether she was yielding or defiant as the words burst from her.

An expression, half trouble, half compunction, came into his face.

'I knew,' he said, very low; 'or rather, I guessed.' And for an instant it occurred to him to unburden himself, to ask her pardon for that espionage of his. But no, no; not till he had her safe. 'I guessed, I mean, that there had been something grave between you. I saw you were sad. I would have given the world to comfort you.'

Her lip quivered childishly.

'I said I loved him that night. The next morning he wrote to me that it could never be.'

He looked at her a moment embarrassed. The conversation was not easy. Then the smile broke once more.

'And you have forgotten him as he deserved. If I were not sure of that I could wish him all the tortures of the *Inferno!* As it is, I cannot think of him; I cannot let you think of him. Sweet, do you know that ever since I first saw you the one thought of my days, the dream of my nights, the purpose of my whole life, has been to win you? There was another in the field; I knew it. I stood by and waited. He failed you — I knew he must in some form or other. Then I was hasty, and you resented it. Little tyrant, you made yourself a Rose with many thorns! But, tell me, tell me, it is all over — your pain, my waiting. Make yourself sweet to me! unfold to me at last!'

An instant she wavered. His bliss was almost in his grasp. Then she sprang up, and Flaxman found himself standing by her, rebuffed and surprised.

'No, no!' she cried, holding out her hands to him, though, all the time. 'Oh, it is too soon! I should despise myself, I do despise myself. It tortures me that I can change and forget so easily; it ought to torture you. Oh, don't ask me yet to — to —'

'To be my wife,' he said calmly, his cheek a little flushed, his eye meeting hers with a passion in it that strove so hard for self-control it was almost sternness.

'Not yet!' she pleaded, and then, after a moment's hesitation, she broke into the most appealing smiles, though the tears were in her eyes, hurrying out the broken, beseeching words. 'I want a friend so much — a real friend. Since Catherine left I have had no one. I have been running riot. Take me in hand. Write to me, scold me, advise me, I will be your pupil, I will tell you everything. You seem to me so fearfully wise, so much older. Oh, don't be vexed. And — and — in six months —'

She turned away, rosy as her name. He held her still, so rigidly, that her hands were almost hurt. The shadow of the hat fell over her eyes; the delicate outlines of the neck and shoulders in the pretty pale dress were defined against the green hill background. He studied her deliberately, a hundred different expressions sweeping across his face. A debate of the most feverish interest was going on within him. Her seriousness at the moment, the chances of the future, her character, his own — all these knotty points entered into it, had to be weighed and decided with lightning rapidity. But Hugh Flaxman was born under a lucky star, and the natal charm held good.

At last he gave a long breath; he stooped and kissed her hands.

'So be it. For six months I will be your guardian, your friend, your teasing implacable censor. At the end of that time I will be — well, never mind what. I give you fair warning.'

He released her. Rose clasped her hands before her and stood drooping. Now that she had gained her point, all her bright mocking independence seemed to have vanished. She might have been in reality the tremulous timid child she seemed. His spirits rose; he began to like the rôle she had assigned to him. The touch of unexpectedness, in all she said and did, acted with exhilarating force on his fastidious romantic sense.

'Now, then,' he said, picking up her gloves from the grass, 'you have given me my rights; I will begin to exercise them at once. I must take you home, the clouds are coming up again, and on the way will you kindly give me a full, true, and minute account of these two months during which you have been so dangerously left to your own devices?'

She hesitated, and began to speak with difficulty, her eyes on the ground. But by the time they were in the main Shanmoor path again, and she was not so weakly dependent on his physical aid, her spirits too returned. Pacing along with her hands behind her, she began by degrees to throw into her accounts of her various visits and performances plenty of her natural malice.

And after a bit, as that strange storm of feeling which had assailed her on the mountain-top abated

something of its bewildering force, certain old grievances began to raise very lively heads in her. The smart of Lady Fauntleroy's ball was still there; she had not yet forgiven him all those relations; and the teasing image of Lady Florence woke up in her.

'It seems to me,' he said at last drily, as he opened a gate for her not far from Burwood, 'that you have been making yourself agreeable to a vast number of people. In my new capacity of censor I should like to warn you that there is nothing so bad for the character as universal popularity.'

'*I* have not got a thousand and one important cousins!' she exclaimed, her lip curling. 'If I want to please, I must take pains, else "nobody minds me."'

He looked at her attentively, his handsome face aglow with animation.

'What can you mean by that?' he said slowly.

But she was quite silent, her head well in air.

'Cousins?' he repeated. 'Cousins? And clearly meant as a taunt at me! Now when did you see my cousins? I grant that I possess a monstrous and indefensible number. I have it. You think that at Lady Fauntleroy's ball I devoted myself too much to my family, and too little to —'

'Not at all!' cried Rose hastily, adding, with charming incoherence, while she twisted a sprig of honeysuckle in her restless fingers. '*Some* cousins of course are pretty.'

He paused an instant; then a light broke over his face, and his burst of quiet laughter was infinitely pleasant to hear. Rose got redder and redder. She realised dimly that she was hardly maintaining the

spirit of their contract, and that he was studying her with eyes inconveniently bright and penetrating.

'Shall I quote to you,' he said, 'a sentence of Sterne's? If it violate our contract I must plead extenuating circumstances. Sterne is admonishing a young friend as to his manners in society: "You are in love," he says. "*Tant mieux.* But do not imagine that the fact bestows on you a licence to behave like a bear towards all the rest of the world. *Affection may surely conduct thee through an avenue of women to her who possesses thy heart without tearing the flounces of any of their petticoats*" — not even those of little cousins of seventeen! I say this, you will observe, in the capacity you have assigned me. In another capacity I venture to think I could justify myself still better.'

'My guardian and director,' cried Rose, 'must not begin his functions by misleading and sophistical quotations from the classics!'

He did not answer for a moment. They were at the gate of Burwood, under a thick screen of wild cherry trees. The gate was half-open, and his hand was on it.

'And my pupil,' he said, bending to her, 'must not begin by challenging the prisoner whose hands she has bound, or he will not answer for the consequences!'

His words were threatening, but his voice, his fine expressive face, were infinitely sweet. By a kind of fascination she never afterwards understood, Rose for answer startled him and herself. She bent her head; she laid her lips on the hand which held the gate, and then she was through it in an instant. He followed her in vain. He never overtook her till at

the drawing-room door she paused with amazing dignity.

'Mamma,' she said, throwing it open, 'here is Mr. Flaxman. He is come from Norway, and is on his way to Ullswater. I will go and speak to Margaret about tea.'

## CHAPTER XLVIII

AFTER the little incident recorded at the end of the preceding chapter, Hugh Flaxman may be forgiven if, as he walked home along the valley that night towards the farmhouse where he had established himself, he entertained a very comfortable scepticism as to the permanence of that curious contract into which Rose had just forced him. However, he was quite mistaken. Rose's maiden dignity avenged itself abundantly on Hugh Flaxman for the injuries it had received at the hands of Langham. The restraints, the anomalies, the hairsplittings of the situation delighted her ingenuous youth. 'I am free — he is free. We will be friends for six months. Possibly we may not suit one another at all. If we do — *then* —'

In the thrill of that *then* lay, of course, the whole attraction of the position.

So that next morning Hugh Flaxman saw the comedy was to be scrupulously kept up. It required a tolerably strong masculine certainty at the bottom of him to enable him to resign himself once more to his part. But he achieved it, and being himself a modern of the moderns, a lover of half-shades and refinements of all sorts, he began very soon to enjoy it, and to play it with an increasing cleverness and perfection.

How Rose got through Agnes's cross-questioning on the matter history sayeth not. Of one thing, however,

a conscientious historian may be sure, namely, that Agnes succeeded in knowing as much as she wanted to know. Mrs. Leyburn was a little puzzled by the erratic lines of Mr. Flaxman's journeys. It was, as she said, curious that a man should start on a tour through the Lakes from Long Whindale.

But she took everything naïvely as it came, and as she was told. Nothing with her ever passed through any changing crucible of thought. It required no planning to elude her. Her mind was like a stretch of wet sand, on which all impressions are equally easy to make and equally fugitive. He liked them all, she supposed, in spite of the comparative scantiness of his later visits to Lerwick Gardens, or he would not have come out of his way to see them. But as nobody suggested anything else to her, her mind worked no further, and she was as easily beguiled after his appearance as before it by the intricacies of some new knitting.

Things of course might have been different if Mrs. Thornburgh had interfered again; but, as we know, poor Catherine's sorrows had raised a whole odd host of misgivings in the mind of the vicar's wife. She prowled nervously round Mrs. Leyburn, filled with contempt for her placidity; but she did not attack her. She spent herself, indeed, on Rose and Agnes, but long practice had made them adepts in the art of baffling her; and when Mr. Flaxman went to tea at the vicarage in their company, in spite of an absorbing desire to get at the truth, which caused her to forget a new cap, and let fall a plate of tea-cakes, she was obliged to confess crossly to the vicar afterwards

that no one could tell what a man like that was after. She supposed his manners were very aristocratic, but for her part she liked plain people.

On the last morning of Mr. Flaxman's stay in the valley he entered the Burwood drive about eleven o'clock, and Rose came down the steps to meet him. For a moment he flattered himself that her disturbed looks were due to the nearness of their farewells.

'There is something wrong,' he said, softly detaining her hand a moment — so much, at least, was in his right.

'Robert is ill. There has been an accident at Petites Dalles. He has been in bed for a week. They hope to get home in a few days. Catherine writes bravely, but she is evidently very low.'

Hugh Flaxman's face fell. Certain letters he had received from Elsmere in July had lain heavy on his mind ever since, so pitiful was the half-conscious revelation in them of an incessant physical struggle. An accident! Elsmere was in no state for accidents. What miserable ill-luck!

Rose read him Catherine's account. It appeared that on a certain stormy day a swimmer had been observed in difficulties among the rocks skirting the northern side of the Petites Dalles bay. The old *baigneur* of the place, owner of the still primitive *établissement des bains*, without stopping to strip, or even to take off his heavy boots, went out to the man in danger with a plank. The man took the plank and was safe. Then to the people watching, it became evident that the *baigneur* himself was in peril. He became unaccountably feeble in the water, and

the cry rose that he was sinking. Robert, who happened to be bathing near, ran off to the spot, jumped in, and swam out. By this time the old man had drifted some way. Robert succeeded, however, in bringing him in, and then, amid an excited crowd, headed by the *baigneur's* wailing family, they carried the unconscious form on to the higher beach. Elsmere was certain life was not extinct, and sent off for a doctor. Meanwhile no one seemed to have any common sense, or any knowledge of how to proceed, but himself. For two hours he stayed on the beach in his dripping bathing-clothes, a cold wind blowing, trying every device known to him: rubbing, hot bottles, artificial respiration. In vain. The man was too old and too bloodless. Directly after the doctor arrived he breathed his last, amid the wild and passionate grief of wife and children.

Robert, with a cloak flung about him, still stayed to talk to the doctor, to carry one of the *baigneur's* sobbing grandchildren to its mother in the village. Then, at last, Catherine got hold of him, and he submitted to be taken home, shivering, and deeply depressed by the failure of his efforts. A violent gastric and lung chill declared itself almost immediately, and for three days he had been anxiously ill. Catherine, miserable, distrusting the local doctor, and not knowing how to get hold of a better one, had never left him night or day. 'I had not the heart to write even to you,' she wrote to her mother. 'I could think of nothing but trying one thing after another. Now he has been in bed eight days, and is much better. He talks of getting up to-morrow, and declares he must

go home next week. I have tried to persuade him to stay here another fortnight, but the thought of his work distresses him so much that I hardly dare urge it. I cannot say how I dread the journey. He is not fit for it in any way.'

Rose folded up the letter, her face softened to a most womanly gravity. Hugh Flaxman paused a moment outside the door, his hands on his sides, considering.

'I shall not go on to Scotland,' he said; 'Mrs. Elsmere must not be left. I will go off there at once.'

In Rose's soberly-sweet looks as he left her, Hugh Flaxman saw for an instant, with the stirring of a joy as profound as it was delicate, not the fanciful enchantress of the day before, but his wife that was to be. And yet she held him to his bargain. All that his lips touched as he said good-bye was the little bunch of yellow briar roses she gave him from her belt.

Thirty hours later he was descending the long hill from Sassetôt to Petites Dalles. It was the 1st of September. A chilly west wind blew up the dust before him and stirred the parched leafage of the valley. He knocked at the door, of which the woodwork was all peeled and blistered by the sun. Catherine herself opened it.

'This is kind — this is like yourself!' she said, after a first stare of amazement, when he had explained himself. 'He is in there, much better.'

Robert looked up, stupefied, as Hugh Flaxman entered. But he sprang up with his old brightness.

'Well, this *is* friendship! What on earth brings you

here, old fellow? Why aren't you in the stubbles celebrating St. Partridge?'

Hugh Flaxman said what he had to say very shortly, but so as to make Robert's eyes gleam, and to bring his thin hand with a sort of caressing touch upon Flaxman's shoulder.

'I shan't try to thank you — Catherine can if she likes. How relieved she will be about that bothering journey of ours! However, I am really ever so much better. It was very sharp while it lasted; and the doctor no great shakes. But there never was such a woman as my wife; she pulled me through! And now then, sir, just kindly confess yourself a little more plainly. What brought you and my sisters-in-law together? You need not try and persuade *me* that Long Whindale is the natural gate of the Lakes, or the route intended by Heaven from London to Scotland, though I have no doubt you tried that little fiction on them.'

Hugh Flaxman laughed, and sat down very deliberately.

'I am glad to see that illness has not robbed you of that perspicacity for which you are so remarkable, Elsmere. Well, the day before yesterday I asked your sister Rose to marry me. She —'

'Go on, man,' cried Robert, exasperated by his pause.

'I don't know how to put it,' said Flaxman calmly. 'For six months we are to be rather more than friends, and a good deal less than *fiancés*. I am to be allowed to write to her. You may imagine how seductive it is to one of the worst and laziest letter-writers in the

three kingdoms that his fortunes in love should be made to depend on his correspondence. I may scold her *if* she gives me occasion. And in six months, as one says to a publisher, "the agreement will be open to revision." '

Robert stared.

'And you are not engaged?'

'Not as I understand it,' replied Flaxman. 'Decidedly not!' he added with energy, remembering that very platonic farewell.

Robert sat with his hands on his knees, ruminating.

'A fantastic thing, the modern young woman! Still I think I can understand. There may have been more than mere caprice in it.'

His eye met his friend's significantly.

'I suppose so,' said Flaxman quietly. Not even for Robert's benefit was he going to reveal any details of that scene on High Fell. 'Never mind, old fellow, I am content. And, indeed, *faute de mieux*, I should be content with anything that brought me nearer to her, were it but by the thousandth of an inch.'

Robert grasped his hand affectionately.

'Catherine,' he called through the door, 'never mind the supper; let it burn. Flaxman brings news.'

Catherine listened to the story with amazement. Certainly her ways would never have been as her sister's.

'Are we supposed to know?' she asked, very naturally.

'She never forbade me to tell,' said Flaxman, smiling. 'I think, however, if I were you, I should say nothing about it — yet. I told her it was part of our

bargain that *she* should explain my letters to Mrs. Leyburn. I gave her free leave to invent any fairy-tale she pleased, but it was to be *her* invention, not mine.'

Neither Robert nor Catherine was very well pleased. But there was something reassuring as well as comic in the stoicism with which Flaxman took his position. And clearly the matter must be left to manage itself.

Next morning the weather had improved. Robert, his hand on Flaxman's arm, got down to the beach. Flaxman watched him critically, did not like some of his symptoms, but thought on the whole he must be recovering at the normal rate, considering how severe the attack had been.

'What do you think of him?' Catherine asked him next day, with all her soul in her eyes. They had left Robert established in a sunny nook, and were strolling on along the sands.

'I think you must get him home, call in a first-rate doctor, and keep him quiet,' said Flaxman. 'He will be all right presently.'

'How *can* we keep him quiet?' said Catherine, with a momentary despair in her fine pale face. 'All day long and all night long he is thinking of his work. It is like something fiery burning the heart out of him.'

Flaxman felt the truth of the remark during the four days of calm autumn weather he spent with them before the return journey. Robert would talk to him for hours, now on the sands, with the grey infinity of sea before them, now pacing the bounds of their little room till fatigue made him drop heavily into his long chair; and the burden of it all was the religious future of the working class. He described the scene in the

club, and brought out the dreams swarming in his mind, presenting them for Flaxman's criticism, and dealing with them himself, with that startling mixture of acute common sense and eloquent passion which had always made him so effective as an initiator. Flaxman listened dubiously at first, as he generally listened to Elsmere, and then was carried away, not by the beliefs, but by the man. *He* found his pleasure in dallying with the magnificent *possibility* of the Church; doubt with him applied to all propositions, whether positive or negative; and he had the dislike of the aristocrat and the cosmopolitan for the provincialisms of religious dissent. Political dissent or social reform was another matter. Since the Revolution, every generous child of the century has been open to the fascination of political or social Utopias. But religion! *What — what is truth?* Why not let the old things alone?

However, it was through the social passion, once so real in him, and still living, in spite of disillusion and self-mockery, that Robert caught him, had in fact been slowly gaining possession of him all these months.

'Well,' said Flaxman one day, 'suppose I grant you that Christianity of the old sort shows strong signs of exhaustion, even in England, and in spite of the Church expansion we hear so much about; and suppose I believe with you that things will go badly without religion — what then? Who can have a religion for the asking?'

'But who can have it without? *Seek*, that you may find. Experiment; try new combinations. If a thing is going that humanity can't do without, and you and

I believe it, what duty is more urgent for us than the effort to replace it?'

Flaxman shrugged his shoulders.

'What will you gain? A new sect?'

'Possibly. But what we *stand* to gain is a new social bond,' was the flashing answer — 'a new compelling force in man and in society. Can you deny that the world wants it? What are you economists and sociologists of the new type always pining for? Why, for that diminution of the self in man which is to enable the individual to see the *world's* ends clearly, and to care not only for his own but for his neighbour's interest, which is to make the rich devote themselves to the poor, and the poor bear with the rich. If man only *would*, he *could*, you say, solve all the problems which oppress him. It is man's will which is eternally defective, eternally inadequate. Well, the great religions of the world are the stimulants by which the power at the root of things has worked upon this sluggish instrument of human destiny. Without religion you cannot make the will equal to its tasks. Our present religion fails us; we must, we will have another!'

He rose and began to pace along the sands, now gently glowing in the warm September evening, Flaxman beside him.

*A new religion!* Of all words, the most tremendous! Flaxman pitifully weighed against it the fraction of force fretting and surging in the thin elastic frame beside him. He knew well, however — few better — that the outburst was not a mere dream and emptiness. There was experience behind it — a burning, driving experience of actual fact.

Presently Robert said, with a change of tone, 'I must have that whole block of warehouses, Flaxman.'

'Must you?' said Flaxman, relieved by the drop from speculation to the practical. 'Why?'

'Look here!' And sitting down again on a sand-hill overgrown with wild grasses and mats of sea-thistle, the poor pale reformer began to draw out the details of his scheme on its material side. Three floors of rooms brightly furnished, well lit and warmed; a large hall for the Sunday lectures, concerts, entertainments, and story-telling; rooms for the boys' club; two rooms for women and girls, reached by a separate entrance; a library and reading-room open to both sexes, well stored with books, and made beautiful by pictures; three or four smaller rooms to serve as committee rooms and for the purposes of the Naturalist Club which had been started in May on the Murewell plan; and, if possible, a gymnasium.

'*Money!*' he said, drawing up with a laugh in mid-career. 'There's the rub, of course. But I shall manage it.'

To judge from the past, Flaxman thought it extremely likely that he would. He studied the cabalistic lines Elsmere's stick had made in the sand for a minute or two; then he said drily, 'I will take the first expense; and draw on me afterwards up to five hundred a year, for the first four years.'

Robert turned upon him and grasped his hand.

'I do not thank you,' he said quietly, after a moment's pause; 'the work itself will do that.'

Again they strolled on, talking, plunging into details, till Flaxman's pulse beat as fast as Robert's; so

full of infectious hope and energy was the whole being of the man before him.

'I can take in the women and girls now,' Robert said once. 'Catherine has promised to superintend it all.'

Then suddenly something struck the mobile mind, and he stood an instant looking at his companion. It was the first time he had mentioned Catherine's name in connexion with the North R—— work. Flaxman could not mistake the emotion, the unspoken thanks in those eyes. He turned away, nervously knocking off the ashes of his cigar. But the two men understood each other.

## CHAPTER XLIX

Two days later they were in London again. Robert was a great deal better, and beginning to kick against invalid restraints. All men have their pet irrationalities. Elsmere's irrationality was an aversion to doctors, from the point of view of his own ailments. He had an unbounded admiration for them as a class, and would have nothing to say to them as individuals that he could possibly help. Flaxman was sarcastic; Catherine looked imploring in vain. He vowed that he was treating himself with a skill any professional might envy, and went his way. And for a time the stimulus of London and of his work seemed to act favourably upon him. After his first welcome at the club he came home with bright eye and vigorous step, declaring that he was another man.

Flaxman established himself in St. James's Place. Town was deserted; the partridges at Greenlaws clamoured to be shot; the head-keeper wrote letters which would have melted the heart of a stone. Flaxman replied recklessly that any decent fellow in the neighbourhood was welcome to shoot his birds — a reply which almost brought upon him the resignation of the outraged keeper by return of post. Lady Charlotte wrote and remonstrated with him for neglecting a landowner's duties, inquiring at the same time what he meant to do with regard to 'that young lady.' To which Flaxman replied calmly that he had just

come back from the Lakes, where he had done, not indeed all that he meant to do, but still something. Miss Leyburn and he were not engaged, but he was on probation for six months, and found London the best place for getting through it.

'So far,' he said, 'I am getting on well, and developing an amount of energy especially in the matter of correspondence, which alone ought to commend the arrangement to the relations of an idle man. But we must be left "to dream our dream unto ourselves alone." One word from anybody belonging to me to anybody belonging to her on the subject, and— But threats are puerile. *For the present*, dear aunt, I am your devoted nephew, HUGH FLAXMAN.'

'*On probation!*'

Flaxman chuckled as he sent off the letter.

He stayed because he was too restless to be anywhere else, and because he loved the Elsmeres for Rose's sake and his own. He thought moreover that a cool-headed friend with an eye for something else in the world than religious reform might be useful just then to Elsmere, and he was determined at the same time to see what the reformer meant to be at.

In the first place, Robert's attention was directed to getting possession of the whole block of buildings, in which the existing school- and lecture-rooms took up only the lowest floor. This was a matter of some difficulty, for the floors above were employed in warehousing goods belonging to various minor import trades, and were held on tenures of different lengths.

However, by dint of some money and much skill, the requisite clearances were effected during September and part of October. By the end of that month all but the top floor, the tenant of which refused to be dislodged, fell into Elsmere's hands.

Meanwhile, at a meeting held every Sunday after lecture — a meeting composed mainly of artisans of the district, but including also Robert's helpers from the West, and a small sprinkling of persons interested in the man and his work from all parts — the details of 'The New Brotherhood of Christ' were being hammered out. Catherine was generally present, sitting a little apart, with a look which Flaxman, who now knew her well, was always trying to decipher afresh — a sort of sweet aloofness, as though the spirit behind it saw, down the vistas of the future, ends and solutions which gave it courage to endure the present. Murray Edwardes too was always there. It often struck Flaxman afterwards that in Robert's attitude towards Edwardes at this time, in his constant desire to bring him forward, to associate him with himself as much as possible in the government and formation of the infant society, there was a half-conscious prescience of a truth that as yet none knew, not even the tender wife, the watchful friend.

The meetings were of extraordinary interest. The men, the great majority of whom had been disciplined and moulded for months by contact with Elsmere's teaching and Elsmere's thought, showed a responsiveness, a receptivity, even a power of initiation which often struck Flaxman with wonder. Were these the men he had seen in the club-hall on the night of

Robert's address — sour, stolid, brutalised, hostile to all things in heaven and earth?

'And we go on prating that the age of saints is over, the rôle of the individual lessening day by day! Fool! go and *be* a saint, go and give yourself to ideas; go and *live* the life hid with Christ in God, and see,' — so would run the quick comment of the observer.

But incessant as was the reciprocity, the interchange and play of feeling between Robert and the wide following growing up around him, it was plain to Flaxman that although he never moved a step without carrying his world with him, he was never at the mercy of his world. Nothing was ever really left to chance. Through all these strange debates, which began rawly and clumsily enough, and grew every week more and more absorbing to all concerned, Flaxman was convinced that hardly any rule or formula of the new society was ultimately adopted which had not been for long in Robert's mind — thought out and brought into final shape, perhaps, on the Petites Dalles sands. It was an unobtrusive art, his art of government, but a most effective one.

At any moment, as Flaxman often felt, at any rate in the early meetings, the discussions as to the religious practices which were to bind together the new association might have passed the line, and become puerile or grotesque. At any moment the jarring characters and ambitions of the men Elsmere had to deal with might have dispersed that delicate atmosphere of moral sympathy and passion in which the whole new birth seemed to have been conceived, and upon the

maintenance of which its fruition and development depended. But as soon as Elsmere appeared, difficulties vanished, enthusiasm sprang up again. The rules of the new society came simply and naturally into being, steeped and haloed, as it were, from the beginning, in the passion and genius of one great heart. The fastidious critical instinct in Flaxman was silenced no less than the sour, half-educated analysis of such a man as Lestrange.

In the same way all personal jars seemed to melt away beside him. There were some painful things connected with the new departure. Wardlaw, for instance, a conscientious Comtist, refusing stoutly to admit anything more than 'an unknowable reality behind phenomena,' was distressed and affronted by the strongly religious bent Elsmere was giving to the work he had begun. Lestrange, who was a man of great though raw ability, who almost always spoke at the meetings, and whom Robert was bent on attaching to the society, had times when the things he was half-inclined to worship one day he was much more inclined to burn the next in the sight of all men, and when the smallest failure of temper on Robert's part might have entailed a disagreeable scene, and the possible formation of a harassing left wing.

But Robert's manner to Wardlaw was that of a grateful younger brother. It was clear that the Comtist could not formally join the Brotherhood. But all the share and influence that could be secured him in the practical working of it was secured him. And what was more, Robert succeeded in infusing his own

delicacy, his own compunctions on the subject, into the men and youths who had profited in the past by Wardlaw's rough self-devotion. So that if, through much that went on now, he could only be a spectator, at least he was not allowed to feel himself an alien or forgotten.

As to Lestrange, against a man who was as ready to laugh as to preach, and into whose ardent soul Nature had infused a saving sense of the whimsical in life and character, cynicism and vanity seemed to have no case. Robert's quick temper had been wonderfully disciplined by life since his Oxford days. He had now very little of that stiff-neckedness, so fatal to the average reformer, which makes a man insist on all or nothing from his followers. He took what each man had to give. Nay, he made it almost seem as though the grudging support of Lestrange, or the critical half-patronising approval of the young barrister from the West who came down to listen to him, and made a favour of teaching in his night-school, were as precious to him as was the whole-hearted, the self-abandoning veneration, which the majority of those about him had begun to show towards the man in whom, as Charles Richards said, they had 'seen God.'

At last by the middle of November the whole great building, with the exception of the top floor, was cleared and ready for use. Robert felt the same joy in it, in its clean paint, the half-filled shelves in the library, the pictures standing against the walls ready to be hung, the rolls of bright-coloured matting ready to be laid down, as he had felt in the Murewell In-

stitute. He and Flaxman, helped by a voluntary army of men, worked at it from morning till night. Only Catherine could ever persuade him to remember that he was not yet physically himself.

Then came the day when the building was formally opened, when the gilt letters over the door, 'The New Brotherhood of Christ,' shone out into the dingy street, and when the first enrolment of names in the book of the Brotherhood took place.

For two hours a continuous stream of human beings surrounded the little table beside which Elsmere stood, inscribing their names, and receiving from him the silver badge, bearing the head of Christ, which was to be the outward and conspicuous sign of membership. Men came of all sorts: the intelligent well-paid artisan, the pallid clerk or small accountant, stalwart warehousemen, huge carters and draymen, the boy attached to each by the laws of the profession often straggling lumpishly behind his master. Women were there: wives who came because their lords came, or because Mr. Elsmere had been 'that good' to them that anything they could do to oblige him 'they would, and welcome'; prim pupil-teachers, holding themselves with straight superior shoulders; children, who came trooping in, grinned up into Robert's face and retreated again with red cheeks, the silver badge tight clasped in hands which not even much scrubbing could make passable.

Flaxman stood and watched it from the side. It was an extraordinary scene: the crowd, the slight figure on the platform, the two great inscriptions, which represented the only 'articles' of

the new faith, gleaming from the freshly-coloured walls —

*'In Thee, O Eternal, have I put my trust'*;
*'This do in remembrance of Me'*;

— the recesses on either side of the hall lined with white marble, and destined, the one to hold the names of the living members of the Brotherhood, the other to commemorate those who had passed away (empty this last save for the one poor name of 'Charles Richards'); the copies of Giotto's Paduan Virtues — faith, fortitude, charity, and the like — which broke the long wall at intervals. The cynic in the onlooker tried to assert itself against the feeling with which the air seemed overcharged. In vain.

'Whatever comes of it,' Flaxman said to himself with strong involuntary conviction, 'whether he fails or no, the spirit that is moving here is the same spirit that spread the Church, the spirit that sent out Benedictine and Franciscan into the world, that fired the children of Luther, or Calvin, or George Fox; the spirit of devotion, through a man, to an idea; through one much-loved, much-trusted soul to some eternal verity, newly caught, newly conceived, behind it. There is no approaching the idea for the masses except through the human life; there is no lasting power for the man except as the slave of the idea!'

A week later he wrote to his aunt as follows. He could not write to her of Rose, he did not care to write of himself, and he knew that Elsmere's club address had left a mark even on her restless and overcrowded mind. Moreover, he himself was absorbed.

'We are in the full stream of religion-making. I

watch it with a fascination you at a distance cannot possibly understand, even when my judgement demurs, and my intelligence protests that the thing cannot live without Elsmere, and that Elsmere's life is a frail one. After the ceremony of enrolment which I described to you yesterday the Council of the New Brotherhood was chosen by popular election, and Elsmere gave an address. Two thirds of the council, I should think, are workingmen, the rest of the upper class; Elsmere, of course, president.

'Since then the first religious service under the new constitution has been held. The service is extremely simple, and the basis of the whole is "new bottles for the new wine." The opening prayer is recited by everybody present standing. It is rather an act of adoration and faith than a prayer, properly so called. It represents, in fact, the placing of the soul in the presence of God. The mortal turns to the eternal; the ignorant and imperfect look away from themselves to the knowledge and perfection of the All-Holy. It is Elsmere's drawing-up, I imagine — at any rate it is essentially modern, expressing the modern spirit, answering to modern need, as I imagine the first Christian prayers expressed the spirit and answered to the need of an earlier day.

'Then follows some passage from the life of Christ. Elsmere reads it and expounds it, in the first place, as a lecturer might expound a passage of Tacitus, historically and critically. His explanation of miracle, his efforts to make his audience realise the germs of miraculous belief which each man carries with him in the constitution and inherited furniture of his mind,

are some of the most ingenious — perhaps the most convincing — I have ever heard. My heart and my head have never been very much at one, as you know, on this matter of the marvellous element in religion.

'But then when the critic has done, the poet and the believer begins. Whether he has got hold of the true Christ is another matter; but that the Christ he preaches moves the human heart as much as — and in the case of the London artisan, more than — the current orthodox presentation of him, I begin to have ocular demonstration.

'I was present, for instance, at his children's Sunday class the other day. He had brought them up to the story of the Crucifixion, reading from the Revised Version, and amplifying wherever the sense required it. Suddenly a little girl laid her head on the desk before her, and with choking sobs implored him not to go on. The whole class seemed ready to do the same. The pure human pity of the story — the contrast between the innocence and the pain of the sufferer — seemed to be more than they could bear. And there was no comforting sense of a jugglery by which the suffering was not real after all, and the sufferer not man but God.

'He took one of them upon his knee and tried to console them. But there is something piercingly penetrating and austere even in the consolations of this new faith. He did but remind the children of the burden of gratitude laid upon them. "Would you let him suffer so much in vain? His suffering has made you and me happier and better to-day, at this moment, than we could have been without Jesus. You will

understand how, and why, more clearly when you grow up. Let us in return keep him in our hearts always, and obey his words! It is all you can do for his sake, just as all you could do for a mother who died would be to follow her wishes and sacredly keep her memory."

'That was about the gist of it. It was a strange little scene, wonderfully suggestive and pathetic.

'But a few more words about the Sunday service. After the address came a hymn. There are only seven hymns in the little service-book, gathered out of the finest we have. It is supposed that in a short time they will become so familiar to the members of the Brotherhood that they will be sung readily by heart. The singing of them in the public service alternates with an equal number of psalms. And both psalms and hymns are meant to be recited or sung constantly in the homes of the members, and to become part of the everyday life of the Brotherhood. They have been most carefully chosen, and a sort of ritual importance has been attached to them from the beginning. Each day in the week has its particular hymn or psalm.

'Then the whole wound up with another short prayer, also repeated standing, a commendation of the individual, the Brotherhood, the nation, the world, to God. The phrases of it are terse and grand. One can see at once that it has laid hold of the popular sense, the popular memory. The Lord's Prayer followed. Then, after a silent pause of "recollection," Elsmere dismissed them.

'*"Go in peace, in the love of God, and in the memory of His servant, Jesus."*

'I looked carefully at the men as they were tramping out. Some of them were among the Secularist speakers you and I heard at the club in April. In my wonder, I thought of a saying of Vinet's: *"C'est pour la religion que le peuple a le plus de talent; c'est en religion qu'il montre le plus d'esprit."*'

In a later letter he wrote:—

'I have not yet described to you what is perhaps the most characteristic, the most binding practice of the New Brotherhood. It is that which has raised most angry comment, cries of "profanity," "wanton insult," and what not. I came upon it yesterday in an interesting way. I was working with Elsmere at the arrangement of the library, which is now becoming a most fascinating place, under the management of a librarian chosen from the neighbourhood, when he asked me to go and take a message to a carpenter who has been giving us voluntary help in the evenings after his day's work. He thought that as it was the dinner hour, and the man worked in the dock close by, I might find him at home. I went off to the model lodging-house where I was told to look for him, mounted the common stairs, and knocked at his door. Nobody seemed to hear me, and as the door was ajar I pushed it open.

'Inside was a curious sight.

'The table was spread with the midday meal. Round the table stood four children, the eldest about fourteen, and the youngest six or seven. At one end of it stood the carpenter himself in his working apron, a brawny Saxon, bowed a little by his trade. Before him was a plate of bread, and his horny

hands were resting on it. The street was noisy; they had not heard my knock; and as I pushed open the door there was an old coat hanging over the corner of it which concealed me.

'Something in the attitudes of all concerned reminded me, kept me where I was, silent.

'The father lifted his right hand.

'"The Master said, '*This do in remembrance of Me!*'"

'The children stooped for a moment in silence, then the youngest said slowly, in a little softened cockney voice that touched me extraordinarily, —

'"*Jesus, we remember Thee always!*"

'It was the appointed response. As she spoke I recollected the child perfectly at Elsmere's class. I also remembered that she had no mother; that her mother had died of cancer in June, visited and comforted to the end by Elsmere and his wife.

'Well, the great question of course remains — is there a sufficient strength of *feeling* and *conviction* behind these things? If so, after all, everything was new once, and Christianity was but modified Judaism.'

'December 22.

'I believe I shall soon be as deep in this matter as Elsmere. In Elgood Street great preparations are going on for Christmas. But it will be a new sort of Christmas. We shall hear very little, it seems, of angels and shepherds, and a great deal of the humble childhood of a little Jewish boy whose genius grown to maturity transformed the Western world. To see Elsmere, with his boys and girls about him, trying to

make them feel themselves the heirs and fellows of the Nazarene child, to make them understand something of the lessons that child must have learnt, the sights he must have seen, and the thoughts that must have come to him, is a spectacle of which I will not miss more than I can help. Don't imagine, however, that I am converted exactly! — but only that I am more interested and stimulated than I have been for years. And don't expect me for Christmas. I shall stay here.'

'New Year's Day.

'I am writing from the library of the New Brotherhood. The amount of activity, social, educational, religious, of which this great building promises to be the centre is already astonishing. Everything, of course including the constitution of the infant society, is as yet purely tentative and experimental. But for a scheme so young, things are falling into working order with wonderful rapidity. Each department is worked by committees under the central council. Elsmere, of course, is *ex-officio* chairman of a large proportion; Wardlaw, Mackay, I, and a few other fellows "run" the rest for the present. But each committee contains workingmen; and it is the object of everybody concerned to make the workman element more and more real and efficient. What with the "tax" on the members which was fixed by a general meeting, and the contributions from outside, the society already commands a fair income. But Elsmere is anxious not to attempt too much at once, and will go slowly and train his workers.

'Music, it seems, is to be a great feature in the future. I have my own projects as to this part of the business, which, however, I forbid you to guess at.

'By the rules of the Brotherhood, every member is bound to some work in connexion with it during the year, but little or much, as he or she is able. And every meeting, every undertaking of whatever kind, opens with the special "word" or formula of the society, "This do in remembrance of Me."'

'January 6.

'Besides the Sunday lectures, Elsmere is pegging away on Saturday evenings at "The History of the Moral Life in Man." It is a remarkable course, and very largely attended by people of all sorts. He tries to make it an exposition of the leading principles of the new movement, of "that continuous and only revelation of God in life and Nature," which is in reality the basis of his whole thought. By the way, the letters that are pouring in upon him from all parts are extraordinary. They show an amount and degree of interest in ideas of the kind which are surprising to a Laodicean like me. But he is not surprised — says he always expected it — and that there are thousands who only want a rallying-point.

'His personal effect, the love that is felt for him, the passion and energy of the nature — never has our generation seen anything to equal it. As you perceive, I am reduced to taking it all seriously, and don't know what to make of him or myself.

'*She*, poor soul! is now always with him, comes down with him day after day, and works away. She

no more believes in his *ideas*, I think, than she ever did; but all her antagonism is gone. In the midst of the stir about him her face often haunts me. It has changed lately; she is no longer a young woman, but so refined, so spiritual!

'But he is ailing and fragile. *There* is the one cloud on a scene that fills me with increasing wonder and reverence.'

## CHAPTER L

One cold Sunday afternoon in January, Flaxman, descending the steps of the New Brotherhood, was overtaken by a young Dr. Edmondson, an able young physician, just set up for himself as a consultant, who had only lately attached himself to Elsmere, and was now helping him with eagerness to organise a dispensary. Young Edmondson and Flaxman exchanged a few words on Elsmere's lecture, and then the doctor said abruptly, —

'I don't like his looks nor his voice. How long has he been hoarse like that?'

'More or less for the last month. He is very much worried by it himself, and talks of clergyman's throat. He had a touch of it, it appears, once in the country.'

'Clergyman's throat?' Edmondson shook his head dubiously. 'It may be. I wish he would let me overhaul him.'

'I wish he would!' said Flaxman devoutly. 'I will see what I can do. I will get hold of Mrs. Elsmere.'

Meanwhile Robert and Catherine had driven home together. As they entered the study she caught his hands, a suppressed and exquisite passion gleaming in her face.

'You did not explain Him! You never will!'

He stood, held by her, his gaze meeting hers. Then in an instant his face changed, blanched before her — he seemed to gasp for breath — she was only just able

to save him from falling. It was apparently another swoon of exhaustion. As she knelt beside him on the floor, having done for him all she could, watching his return to consciousness, Catherine's look would have terrified any of those who loved her. There are some natures which are never blind, never taken blissfully unawares, and which taste calamity and grief to the very dregs.

'Robert, to-morrow you *will* see a doctor?' she implored him when at last he was safely in bed — white, but smiling.

He nodded.

'Send for Edmondson. What I mind most is this hoarseness,' he said, in a voice that was little more than a tremulous whisper.

Catherine hardly closed her eyes all night. The room, the house, seemed to her stifling, oppressive, like a grave. And, by ill luck, with the morning came a long expected letter, not indeed from the squire, but about the squire. Robert had been for some time expecting a summons to Murewell. The squire had written to him last in October from Clarens, on the Lake of Geneva. Since then weeks had passed without bringing Elsmere any news of him at all. Meanwhile the growth of the New Brotherhood had absorbed its founder, so that the inquiries which should have been sent to Murewell had been postponed. The letter which reached him now was from old Meyrick. 'The squire has had another bad attack, and is *much* weaker. But his mind is clear again, and he greatly desires to see you. If you can, come to-morrow.'

'*His mind is clear again!*' Horrified by the words

and by the images they called up, remorseful also for his own long silence, Robert sprang up from bed, where the letter had been brought to him, and presently appeared downstairs, where Catherine, believing him safely captive for the morning, was going through some household business.

'I *must* go, I *must* go!' he said, as he handed her the letter. 'Meyrick puts it cautiously, but it may be the end!'

Catherine looked at him in despair.

'Robert, you are like a ghost yourself, and I have sent for Dr. Edmondson.'

'Put him off till the day after to-morrow. Dear little wife, listen; my voice is ever so much better. Murewell air will do me good.' She turned away to hide the tears in her eyes. Then she tried fresh persuasions, but it was useless. His look was glowing and restless. She saw he felt it a call impossible to disobey. A telegram was sent to Edmondson, and Robert drove off to Waterloo.

Out of the fog of London it was a mild, sunny winter's day. Robert breathed more freely with every mile. His eyes took note of every landmark in the familiar journey with a thirsty eagerness. It was a year and a half since he had travelled it. He forgot his weakness, the exhausting pressure and publicity of his new work. The past possessed him, thrust out the present. Surely he had been up to London for the day and was going back to Catherine!

At the station he hailed an old friend among the cabmen.

'Take me to the corner of Murewell lane, Tom.

Then you may drive on my bag to the Hall, and I shall walk over the common.'

The man urged on his tottering old steed with a will. In the streets of the little town Robert saw several acquaintances who stopped and stared at the apparition. Were the houses, the people real, or was it all a hallucination — his flight and his return, so unthought of yesterday, so easy and swift to-day?

By the time they were out on the wild ground between the market-town and Murewell, Robert's spirits were as buoyant as thistle-down. He and the driver kept up an incessant gossip over the neighbourhood, and he jumped down from the carriage as the man stopped with the alacrity of a boy.

'Go on, Tom; see if I am not there as soon as you.'

'Looks most uncommon bad,' the man muttered to himself as his horse shambled off. 'Seems as spry as a lark all the same.'

Why, the gorse was out, positively out in January! and the thrushes were singing as though it were March. Robert stopped opposite a bush covered with timid half-opened blooms, and thought he had seen nothing so beautiful since he had last trodden that road in spring. Presently he was in the same cart-track he had crossed on the night of his confession to Catherine; he lingered beside the same solitary fir on the brink of the ridge. A winter world lay before him; soft brown woodland, or reddish heath and fern, struck sideways by the sun, clothing the earth's bareness everywhere — curling mists — blue points of distant hill — a grey luminous depth of sky.

The eyes were moist, the lips moved. There in the

place of his old anguish he stood and blessed God! — not for any personal happiness, but simply for that communication of Himself which may make every hour of common living a revelation.

Twenty minutes later, leaving the park gate to his left, he hurried up the lane leading to the vicarage. One look! he might not be able to leave the squire later. The gate of the wood-path was ajar. Surely just inside it he should find Catherine in her garden hat, the white-frocked child dragging behind her! And there was the square stone house, the brown corn-field, the red-brown woods! Why, what had the man been doing with the study? White blinds showed it was a bedroom now. Vandal! Besides, how could the boys have free access except to that ground-floor room? And all that pretty stretch of grass under the acacia had been cut up into stiff little lozenge-shaped beds, filled, he supposed, in summer with the properest geraniums. He should never dare to tell that to Catherine.

He stood and watched the little significant signs of change in this realm, which had been once his own, with a dissatisfied mouth, his undermind filled the while with tempestuous yearning and affection. In that upper room he had lain through that agonised night of crisis; the dawn-twitterings of the summer birds seemed to be still in his ears. And there, in the distance, was the blue wreath of smoke hanging over Mile End. Ah! the new cottages must be warm this winter. The children did not lie in the wet any longer — thank God! Was there time just to run down to Irwin's cottage, to have a look at the Institute?

He had been standing on the farther side of the road from the rectory that he might not seem to be spying out the land and his successor's ways too closely. Suddenly he found himself clinging to a gate near him that led into a field. He was shaken by a horrible struggle for breath. The self seemed to be foundering in a stifling sea, and fought like a drowning thing. When the moment passed, he looked round him bewildered, drawing his hand across his eyes. The world had grown black — the sun seemed to be scarcely shining. Were those the sounds of children's voices on the hill, the rumbling of a cart — or was it all, sight and sound alike, mirage and delirium?

With difficulty, leaning on his stick as though he were a man of seventy, he groped his way back to the Park. There he sank down, still gasping, among the roots of one of the great cedars near the gate. After a while the attack passed off and he found himself able to walk on. But the joy, the leaping pulse of half an hour ago, were gone from his veins. Was that the river — the house? He looked at them with dull eyes. All the light was lowered. A veil seemed to lie between him and the familiar things.

However, by the time he reached the door of the Hall will and nature had reasserted themselves, and he knew where he was and what he had to do.

Vincent flung the door open with his old lordly air.

'Why, sir! *Mr.* Elsmere!'

The butler's voice began on a note of joyful surprise, sliding at once into one of alarm. He stood and stared at this ghost of the old rector.

Elsmere grasped his hand, and asked him to take

him into the dining-room and give him some wine before announcing him. Vincent ministered to him with a long face, pressing all the alcoholic resources of the Hall upon him in turn. The squire was much better, he declared, and had been carried down to the library.

'But, lor, sir, there ain't much to be said for your looks neither — seems as if London did n't suit you, sir.'

Elsmere explained feebly that he had been suffering from his throat, and had overtired himself by walking over the common. Then, recognising from a distorted vision of himself in a Venetian mirror hanging by that something of his natural colour had returned to him, he rose and bade Vincent announce him.

'And Mrs. Darcy?' he asked, as they stepped out into the hall again.

'Oh, Mrs. Darcy, sir, she's very well,' said the man, but, as it seemed to Robert, with something of an embarrassed air.

He followed Vincent down the long passage — haunted by old memories, by the old sickening sense of mental anguish — to the curtained door. Vincent ushered him in. There was a stir of feet, and a voice, but at first he saw nothing. The room was very much darkened. Then Meyrick emerged into distinctness.

'Squire, here *is* Mr. Elsmere! Well, Mr. Elsmere, sir, I'm sure we're very much obliged to you for meeting the squire's wishes so promptly. You'll find him poorly, Mr. Elsmere, but mending — oh yes, mending, sir — no doubt of it.'

Elsmere began to perceive a figure by the fire. A bony hand was advanced to him out of the gloom.

'That'll do, Meyrick. You won't be wanted till the evening.'

The imperious note in the voice struck Robert with a sudden sense of relief. After all, the squire was still capable of trampling on Meyrick.

In another minute the door had closed on the old doctor, and the two men were alone. Robert was beginning to get used to the dim light. Out of it the squire's face gleamed almost as whitely as the tortured marble of the Medusa just above their heads.

'It's some inflammation in the eyes,' the squire explained briefly, 'that's made Meyrick set up all this d—d business of blinds and shutters. I don't mean to stand it much longer. The eyes are better, and I prefer to see my way out of the world, if possible.'

'But you are recovering?' Robert said, laying his hand affectionately on the old man's knee.

'I have added to my knowledge,' said the squire drily. 'Like Heine, I am qualified to give lectures in heaven on the ignorance of doctors on earth. And I am not in bed, which I was last week. For Heaven's sake, don't ask questions. If there is a loathsome subject on earth it is the subject of the human body. Well, I suppose my message to you dragged you away from a thousand things you had rather be doing. What are you so hoarse for? Neglecting yourself as usual, for the sake of "the people," who would n't even subscribe to bury you? Have you been working up the Apocrypha as I recommended you last time we met?'

Robert smiled.

'For the last four months, Squire, I have been doing

two things with neither of which had you much sympathy in old days—holiday-making and "slumming."'

'Oh, I remember,' interrupted the squire hastily. 'I was low last week, and read the Church papers by way of a counter-irritant. You have been starting a new religion, I see. A new religion! *Humph!*'

The great head fell forward, and through the dusk Robert caught the sarcastic gleam of the eyes.

'You are hardly the man to deny,' he said, undisturbed, 'that the old ones *laissent à désirer.*'

'Because there are old abuses, is that any reason why you should go and set up a brand-new one? — an ugly anachronism besides,' retorted the squire. 'However, you and I have no common ground — never had. I say *know*, you say *feel.* Where is the difference, after all, between you and any charlatan of the lot? —Well, how is Madame de Netteville?'

'I have not seen her for six months,' Robert replied, with equal abruptness.

The squire laughed a little under his breath.

'What did you think of her?'

'Very much what you told me to think—intellectually,' replied Robert, facing him, but flushing with the readiness of physical delicacy.

'Well, I certainly never told you to think anything — *morally,*' said the squire. 'The word moral has no relation to her. Whom did you see there?'

The catechism was naturally most distasteful to its object, but Elsmere went through with it, the squire watching him for a while with an expression which had a spark of malice in it. It is not unlikely that some gossip of the Lady Aubrey sort had reached him.

Elsmere had always seemed to him oppressively good. The idea that Madame de Netteville had tried her arts upon him was not without its piquancy.

But while Robert was answering a question he was aware of a subtle change in the squire's attitude — a relaxation of his own sense of tension. After a minute he bent forward, peering through the darkness. The squire's head had fallen back, his mouth was slightly open, and the breath came lightly, quiveringly through. The cynic of a moment ago had dropped suddenly into a sleep of more than childish weakness and defencelessness.

Robert remained bending forward, gazing at the man who had once meant so much to him.

Strange white face, sunk in the great chair! Behind it glimmered the Donatello figure, and the divine Hermes, a glorious shape in the dusk, looking scorn on human decrepitude. All round spread the dim walls of books. The life they had nourished was dropping into the abyss out of ken — they remained. Sixty years of effort and slavery to end so — a river lost in the sands!

Old Meyrick stole in again, and stood looking at the sleeping squire.

'A bad sign! a bad sign!' he said, and shook his head mournfully.

After he had made an effort to take some food which Vincent pressed upon him, Robert, conscious of a stronger physical *malaise* than had ever yet tormented him, was crossing the hall again, when he suddenly saw Mrs. Darcy at the door of a room which opened into the hall. He went up to her with a warm greeting.

'Are you going in to the squire? Let us go together.'

She looked at him with no surprise, as though she had seen him the day before, and as he spoke she retreated a step into the room behind her, a curious film, so it seemed to him, darkening her small grey eyes.

'The squire is not here. He is gone away. Have you seen my white mice? Oh, they are such darlings! Only, one of them is ill, and they won't let me have the doctor.'

Her voice sank into the most pitiful plaintiveness. She stood in the middle of the room, pointing with an elfish finger to a large cage of white mice which stood in the window. The room seemed full besides of other creatures. Robert stood rooted, looking at the tiny withered figure in the black dress, its snowy hair and diminutive face swathed in lace, with a perplexity into which there slipped an involuntary shiver. Suddenly he became aware of a woman by the fire, a decent, strong-looking body in grey, who rose as his look turned to her. Their eyes met; her expression and the little jerk of her head towards Mrs. Darcy, who was now standing by the cage coaxing the mice with the weirdest gestures, were enough. Robert turned, and went out sick at heart. The careful exquisite beauty of the great hall struck him as something mocking and anti-human.

No one else in the house said a word to him of Mrs. Darcy. In the evening the squire talked much at intervals, but in another key. He insisted on a certain amount of light, and leaning on Robert's arm, went feebly round the bookshelves. He took out one of the volumes of the Fathers that Newman had given him.

'When I think of the hours I wasted over this barbarous rubbish,' he said, his blanched fingers turning the leaves vindictively, 'and, of the other hours I maundered away in services and self-examination! Thank Heaven, however, the germ of revolt and sanity was always there. And when once I got to it, I learnt my lesson pretty quick.'

Robert paused, his kind inquiring eyes looking down on the shrunken squire.

'Oh, not one *you* have any chance of learning, my good friend,' said the other aggressively. 'And after all it's simple. *Go to your grave with your eyes open* — that's all. But men don't learn it, somehow. Newman was incapable — so are you. All the religions are nothing but so many vulgar anæsthetics, which only the few have courage to refuse.'

'Do you want me to contradict you?' said Robert, smiling; 'I am quite ready.'

The squire took no notice. Presently, when he was in his chair again, he said abruptly, pointing to a mahogany bureau in the window. 'The book is all there — both parts, first and second. Publish it if you please. If not, throw it into the fire. Both are equally indifferent to me. It has done its work; it has helped me through half a century of living.'

'It shall be to me a sacred trust,' said Elsmere with emotion. 'Of course if you don't publish it, I shall publish it.'

'As you please. Well, then, if you have nothing more rational to tell me about, tell me of this ridiculous Brotherhood of yours.'

Robert, so adjured, began to talk, but with difficulty. The words would not flow, and it was almost a relief when in the middle that strange creeping sleep overtook the squire again.

Meyrick, who was staying in the house, and who had been coming in and out through the evening, eyeing Elsmere, now that there was more light on the scene, with almost as much anxiety and misgiving as the squire, was summoned. The squire was put into his carrying-chair. Vincent and a male attendant appeared, and he was borne to his room, Meyrick peremptorily refusing to allow Robert to lend so much as a finger to the performance. They took him up the library stairs, through the empty book-rooms and that dreary room which had been his father's, and so into his own. By the time they set him down he was quite awake and conscious again.

'It can't be said that I follow my own precepts,' he said to Robert grimly, as they put him down. 'Not much of the open eye about this. I shall sleep myself into the unknown as sweetly as any saint in the calendar.'

Robert was going when the squire called him back.

'You'll stay to-morrow, Elsmere?'

'Of course, if you wish it.'

The wrinkled eyes fixed him intently.

'Why did you ever go?'

'As I told you before, Squire, because there was nothing else for an honest man to do.'

The squire turned round with a frown.

'What the deuce are you dawdling about, Benson? Give me my stick and get me out of this.'

By midnight all was still in the vast pile of Murewell. Outside, the night was slightly frosty. A clear moon shone over the sloping reaches of the park; the trees shone silverly in the cold light, their black shadows cast along the grass. Robert found himself quartered in the Stuart room, where James II had slept, and where the tartan hangings of the ponderous carved bed, and the rose and thistle reliefs of the walls and ceilings, untouched for two hundred years, bore witness to the loyal preparations made by some bygone Wendover. He was mortally tired, but by way of distracting his thoughts a little from the squire, and that other tragedy which the great house sheltered somewhere in its walls, he took from his coat-pocket a French 'Anthologie' which had been Catherine's birthday gift to him, and read a little before he fell asleep.

Then he slept profoundly—the sleep of exhaustion. Suddenly he found himself sitting up in bed, his heart beating to suffocation, strange noises in his ears.

A cry 'Help!' resounded through the wide empty galleries.

He flung on his dressing-gown, and ran out in the direction of the squire's room.

The hideous cries and scuffling grew more apparent as he reached it. At that moment Benson, the man who had helped to carry the squire, ran up.

'My God, sir!' he said, deadly white, 'another attack!'

The squire's room was empty, but the door into the lumber-room adjoining it was open, and the stifled sounds came through it.

They rushed in and found Meyrick struggling in the grip of a white figure, that seemed to have the face of a fiend and the grip of a tiger. Those old bloodshot eyes — those wrinkled hands on the throat of the doctor — horrible!

They released poor Meyrick, who staggered bleeding into the squire's room. Then Robert and Benson got the squire back by main force. The whole face was convulsed, the poor shrunken limbs rigid as iron. Meyrick, who was sitting gasping, by a superhuman effort of will mastered himself enough to give directions for a strong opiate. Benson managed to control the madman while Robert found it. Then between them they got it swallowed.

But Nature had been too quick for them. Before the opiate could have had time to work, the squire shrank together like a puppet of which the threads are loosened, and fell heavily sideways out of his captors' hands on to the bed. They laid him there, tenderly covering him from the January cold. The swollen eyelids fell, leaving just a thread of white visible underneath, the clenched hands slowly relaxed; the loud breathing seemed to be the breathing of death.

Meyrick, whose wound on the head had been hastily bound up, threw himself beside the bed. The night-light beyond cast a grotesque shadow of him on the wall, emphasising, as though in mockery, the long straight back, the ragged whiskers, the strange ends and horns of the bandage. But the passion in the old face was as purely tragic as any that ever spoke through the lips of an Antigone or a Gloucester.

'The last — the last!' he said, choked, the tears

falling down his lined cheeks on to the squire's hand. 'He can never rally from this. And I was fool enough to think yesterday I had pulled him through!'

Again a long gaze of inarticulate grief; then he looked up at Robert.

'He would n't have Benson to-night. I slept in the next room with the door ajar. A few minutes ago I heard him moving. I was up in an instant, and found him standing by that door, peering through, barefooted, a wind like ice coming up. He looked at me, frowning, all in a flame. "*My father*," he said — "*my father* — he went that way — what do *you* want here? Keep back!" I threw myself on him; he had something sharp which scratched me on the temple; I got that away from him, but it was his hands' — and the old man shuddered. 'I thought they would have done for me before any one could hear, and that then he would kill himself as his father did.'

Again he hung over the figure on the bed — his own withered hand stroking that of the squire with a yearning affection.

'When was the last attack?' asked Robert sadly.

'A month ago, sir, just after they got back. Ah, Mr. Elsmere, he suffered. And he's been so lonely. No one to cheer him, no one to please him with his food — to put his cushions right — to coax him up a bit, and that — and his poor sister too, always there before his eyes. Of course he would stand to it he liked to be alone. But I'll never believe men are made so unlike one to the other. The Almighty meant a man to have a wife or a child about him when he comes to the last. He missed you, sir, when you went

away. Not that he'd say a word, but he moped. His books did n't seem to please him, nor anything else. I've just broke my heart over him this last year.'

There was silence a moment in the big room, hung round with the shapes of bygone Wendovers. The opiate had taken effect. The squire's countenance was no longer convulsed. The great brow was calm; a more than common dignity and peace spoke from the long peaked face. Robert bent over him. The madman, the cynic, had passed away: the dying scholar and thinker lay before him.

'Will he rally?' he asked, under his breath.

Meyrick shook his head.

'I doubt it. It has exhausted all the strength he had left. The heart is failing rapidly. I think he will sleep away. And, Mr. Elsmere, you go — go and sleep. Benson and I'll watch. Oh, my scratch is nothing, sir. I'm used to a rough-and-tumble life. But you go. If there's a change we'll wake you.'

Elsmere bent down and kissed the squire's forehead tenderly, as a son might have done. By this time he himself could hardly stand. He crept away to his own room, his nerves still quivering with the terror of that sudden waking, the horror of that struggle.

It was impossible to sleep. The moon was at the full outside. He drew back the curtains, made up the fire, and, wrapping himself in a fur coat which Flaxman had lately forced upon him, sat where he could see the moonlit park, and still be within the range of the blaze.

As the excitement passed away a reaction of feverish weakness set in. The strangest whirlwind of

thoughts fled through him in the darkness, suggested very often by the figures on the seventeenth-century tapestry which lined the walls. Were those the trees in the wood-path? Surely that was Catherine's figure, trailing — and that dome — strange! Was he still walking in Grey's funeral procession, the Oxford buildings looking sadly down? Death here! Death there! Death everywhere, yawning under life from the beginning! The veil which hides the common abyss, in sight of which men could not always hold themselves and live, is rent asunder, and he looks shuddering into it.

Then the image changed, and in its stead, that old familiar image of the river of Death took possession of him. He stood himself on the brink; on the other side were Grey and the squire. But he felt no pang of separation, of pain; for he himself was just about to cross and join them! And during a strange brief lull of feeling the mind harboured image and expectation alike with perfect calm.

Then the fever-spell broke — the brain cleared — and he was terribly himself again. Whence came it — this fresh inexorable consciousness? He tried to repel it, to forget himself, to cling blindly, without thought, to God's love and Catherine's. But the anguish mounted fast. On the one hand, this fast-growing certainty, urging and penetrating through every nerve and fibre of the shaken frame; on the other, the ideal fabric of his efforts and his dreams, the New Jerusalem of a regenerate faith; the poor, the loving, and the simple walking therein!

*'My God! my God! no time, no future!'*

In his misery he moved to the uncovered window, and stood looking through it, seeing and not seeing. Outside, the river, just filmed with ice, shone under the moon; over it bent the trees, laden with hoar-frost. Was that a heron, rising for an instant, beyond the bridge, in the unearthly blue?

And quietly — heavily — like an irrevocable sentence, there came, breathed to him as it were from that winter cold and loneliness, words that he had read an hour or two before, in the little red book beside his hand — words in which the gayest of French poets has fixed, as though by accident, the most tragic of all human cries —

'Quittez le long espoir, et les vastes pensées.'

He sank on his knees, wrestling with himself and with the bitter longing for life, and the same words rang through him, deafening every cry but their own.

*'Quittez — quittez — le long espoir, et les vastes pensées!'*

## CHAPTER LI

THERE is little more to tell. The man who had lived so fast was no long time dying. The eager soul was swift in this as in all else.

The day after Elsmere's return from Murewell, where he left the squire still alive (the telegram announcing the death reached Bedford Square a few hours after Robert's arrival), Edmondson came up to see him and examine him. He discovered tubercular disease of the larynx, which begins with slight hoarseness and weakness, and develops into one of the most rapid forms of phthisis. In his opinion it had been originally set up by the effects of the chill at Petites Dalles acting upon a constitution never strong, and at that moment peculiarly susceptible to mischief. And of course the speaking and preaching of the last four months had done enormous harm.

It was with great outward composure that Elsmere received his *arrêt de mort* at the hands of the young doctor, who announced the result of his examination with a hesitating lip and a voice which struggled in vain to preserve its professional calm. He knew too much of medicine himself to be deceived by Edmondson's optimist remarks as to the possible effect of a warm climate like Algiers on his condition. He sat down, resting his head on his hands a moment; then, wringing Edmondson's hand, he went out feebly to find his wife.

Catherine had been waiting in the dining-room, her whole soul one dry tense misery. She stood looking out of the window taking curious heed of a Jewish wedding that was going on in the square, of the preposterous bouquets of the coachman and the gaping circle of errand-boys. How pinched the bride looked in the north wind!

When the door opened and Catherine saw her husband come in — her young husband, to whom she had been married not yet four years — with that indescribable look in the eyes which seemed to divine and confirm all those terrors which had been shaking her during her agonised waiting, there followed a moment between them which words cannot render. When it ended — that half-articulate convulsion of love and anguish — she found herself sitting on the sofa beside him, his head on her breast, his hand clasping hers.

'Do you wish me to go, Catherine?' he asked her gently — 'to Algiers?'

Her eyes implored for her.

'Then I will,' he said, but with a long sigh. 'It will only prolong it two months,' he thought; 'and does one not owe it to the people for whom one has tried to live, to make a brave end among them? Ah, no! no! those two months are *hers!*'

So, without any outward resistance, he let the necessary preparations be made. It wrung his heart to go, but he could not wring hers by staying.

After his interview with Robert, and his further interview with Catherine, to whom he gave the most minute recommendations and directions, with a reverent gentleness which seemed to make the true state

of the case more ghastly plain to the wife than ever, Edmondson went off to Flaxman.

Flaxman heard his news with horror.

'A *bad* case, you say — advanced?'

'A bad case!' Edmondson repeated gloomily. 'He has been fighting against it too long under that absurd delusion of clergyman's throat. If only men would not insist upon being their own doctors! And, of course, that going down to Murewell the other day was madness. I shall go with him to Algiers, and probably stay a week or two. To think of that life, that career, cut short! This is a queer sort of world!'

When Flaxman went over to Bedford Square in the afternoon, he went like a man going himself to execution. In the hall he met Catherine.

'You have seen Dr. Edmondson?' she asked, pale and still, except for a little nervous quivering of the lip.

He stooped and kissed her hand.

'Yes. He says he goes with you to Algiers. I will come after if you will have me. The climate may do wonders.'

She looked at him with the most heart-rending of smiles.

'Will you go in to Robert? He is in the study.'

He went, in trepidation, and found Robert lying tucked up on the sofa, apparently reading.

'Don't — don't, old fellow,' he said affectionately, as Flaxman almost broke down. 'It comes to all of us sooner or later. Whenever it comes we think it too soon. I believe I have been sure of it for some time. We are such strange creatures! It has been so present to me lately that life was too good to last. You remem-

ber the sort of feeling one used to have as a child about some treat in the distance — that it was too much joy — that something was sure to come between you and it? Well, in a sense, I have had my joy, the first-fruits of it at least.'

But as he threw his arms behind his head, leaning back on them, Flaxman saw the eyes darken and the naïve boyish mouth contract, and knew that under all these brave words there was a heart which hungered.

'How strange!' Robert went on reflectively; 'yesterday I was travelling, walking like other men, a member of society. To-day I am an invalid; in the true sense, a man no longer. The world has done with me; a barrier I shall never recross has sprung up between me and it. — Flaxman, to-night is the story-telling. Will you read to them? I have the book here prepared — some scenes from "David Copperfield." And you will tell them?'

A hard task, but Flaxman undertook it. Never did he forget the scene. Some ominous rumour had spread, and the New Brotherhood was besieged. Impossible to give the reading. A hall full of strained upturned faces listened to Flaxman's announcement, and to Elsmere's messages of cheer and exhortation, and then a wild wave of grief spread through the place. The street outside was blocked, men looking dismally into each other's eyes, women weeping, children sobbing for sympathy, all feeling themselves at once shelterless and forsaken. When Elsmere heard the news of it, he turned on his face, and asked even Catherine to leave him for a while.

The preparations were pushed on. The New

Brotherhood had just become the subject of an animated discussion in the press, and London was touched by the news of its young founder's breakdown. Catherine found herself besieged by offers of help of various kinds. One offer Flaxman persuaded her to accept. It was the loan of a villa at El Biar, on the hill above Algiers, belonging to a connexion of his own. A resident on the spot was to take all trouble off their hands; they were to find servants ready for them, and every comfort.

Catherine made every arrangement, met every kindness, with a self-reliant calm that never failed. But it seemed to Flaxman that her heart was broken — that half of her, in feeling, was already on the other side of this horror which stared them all in the face. Was it his perception of it which stirred Robert after a while to a greater hopefulness of speech, a constant bright dwelling on the flowery sunshine for which they were about to exchange the fog and cold of London? The momentary revival of energy was more pitiful to Flaxman than his first quiet resignation.

He himself wrote every day to Rose. Strange love-letters! in which the feeling that could not be avowed ran as a fiery under-current through all the sad brotherly record of the invalid's doings and prospects. There was deep trouble in Long Whindale. Mrs. Leyburn was tearful and hysterical, and wished to rush off to town to see Catherine. Agnes wrote in distress that her mother was quite unfit to travel, showing her own inner conviction, too, that the poor thing would only be an extra burden on the Elsmeres if the journey were achieved. Rose wrote asking to be allowed

to go with them to Algiers; and after a little consultation it was so arranged, Mrs. Leyburn being tenderly persuaded, Robert himself writing, to stay where she was.

The morning after the interview with Edmondson, Robert sent for Murray Edwardes. They were closeted together for nearly an hour. Edwardes came out with the look of one who has been lifted into 'heavenly places.'

'I thank God,' he said to Catherine, with deep emotion, 'that I ever knew him. I pray that I may be found worthy to carry out my pledges to him.'

When Catherine went into the study she found Robert gazing into the fire with dreamy eyes. He started and looked up to her with a smile.

'Murray Edwardes has promised himself heart and soul to the work. If necessary, he will give up his chapel to carry it on. But we hope it will be possible to work them together. What a brick he is! What a blessed chance it was that took me to that breakfast-party at Flaxman's!'

The rest of the time before departure he spent almost entirely in consultation and arrangement with Edwardes. It was terrible how rapidly worse he seemed to grow directly the situation had declared itself, and the determination *not* to be ill had been perforce overthrown. But his struggle against breathlessness and weakness, and all the other symptoms of his state during these last days, was heroic. On the last day of all, by his own persistent wish, a certain number of members of the Brotherhood came to say good-bye to him. They came in one by one, Mac-

donald first. The old Scotchman, from the height of his sixty years of tough weather-beaten manhood, looked down on Robert with a fatherly concern.

'Eh, Mister Elsmere, but it's a fine place yur gawin' tu, they say. Ye'll do weel there, sir — ye'll do weel. And as for the wark, sir, we'll keep it oop — we'll not let the Deil mak' hay o' it, if we knaws it — the auld leer!' he added, with a phraseology which did more honour to the Calvinism of his blood than the philosophy of his training.

Lestrange came in, with a pale sharp face, and said little in his ten minutes. But Robert divined in him a sort of repressed curiosity and excitement akin to that of Voltaire turning his feverish eyes towards *le grand secret*. 'You, who preached to us that consciousness, and God, and the soul are the only realities — are you so sure of it now you are dying, as you were in health? Are your courage, your certainty, what they were?' These were the sort of questions that seemed to underlie the man's spoken words.

There was something trying in it, but Robert did his best to put aside his consciousness of it. He thanked him for his help in the past, and implored him to stand by the young society and Mr. Edwardes.

'I shall hardly come back, Lestrange. But what does one man matter? One soldier falls, another presses forward.'

The watchmaker rose, then paused a moment, a flush passing over him.

'We can't stand without you!' he said abruptly; then, seeing Robert's look of distress, he seemed to cast about for something reassuring to say, but could

find nothing. Robert at last held out his hand with a smile, and he went. He left Elsmere struggling with a pang of horrible depression. In reality there was no man who worked harder at the New Brotherhood during the months that followed than Lestrange. He worked under perpetual protest from the *frondeur* within him, but something stung him on — on — till a habit had been formed which promises to be the joy and salvation of his later life. Was it the haunting memory of that thin figure — the hand clinging to the chair — the white appealing look?

Others came and went, till Catherine trembled for the consequences. She herself took in Mrs. Richards and her children, comforting the sobbing creatures afterwards with a calmness born of her own despair. Robson, in the last stage himself, sent him a grimly characteristic message. 'I shall solve the riddle, sir, before you. The doctor gives me three days. For the first time in my life, I shall know what you are still guessing at. May the blessing of one who never blessed thing or creature before he saw you go with you!'

After it all Robert sank on the sofa with a groan.

'No more!' he said hoarsely — 'no more! Now for air — the sea! To-morrow, wife, to-morrow! *Cras ingens iterabimus æquor.* Ah me! I leave *my* new Salamis behind!'

But on that last evening he insisted on writing letters to Langham and Newcome.

'I will spare Langham the sight of me,' he said, smiling sadly. 'And I will spare myself the sight of Newcome — I could not bear it, I think! But I must say good-bye — for I love them both.'

Next day, two hours after the Elsmeres had left for Dover, a cab drove up to their house in Bedford Square, and Newcome descended from it. 'Gone, sir, two hours ago,' said the housemaid, and the priest turned away with an involuntary gesture of despair. To his dying day the passionate heart bore the burden of that 'too late,' believing that even at the eleventh hour Elsmere would have been granted to his prayers. He might even have followed them, but that a great retreat for clergy he was just on the point of conducting made it impossible.

Flaxman went down with them to Dover. Rose, in the midst of all her new and womanly care for her sister and Robert, was very sweet to him. In any other circumstances, he told himself, he could easily have broken down the flimsy barrier between them, but in those last twenty-four hours he could press no claim of his own.

When the steamer cast loose, the girl, hanging over the side, stood watching the tall figure on the pier against the grey January sky. Catherine caught her look and attitude, and could have cried aloud in her own gnawing pain.

Flaxman got a cheery letter from Edmondson describing their arrival. Their journey had gone well; even the odious passage from Marseilles had been tolerable; little Mary had proved a model traveller; the villa was luxurious, the weather good.

'I have got rooms close by them in the Vice-Consul's cottage,' wrote Edmondson. 'Imagine, within sixty hours of leaving London in a January fog, finding yourself tramping over wild marigolds and mignon-

ette, under a sky and through an air as balmy as those of an English June — when an English June behaves itself. Elsmere's room overlooks the bay, the great plain of the Metidja dotted with villages, and the grand range of the Djurjura, backed by snowy summits one can hardly tell from the clouds. His spirits are marvellous. He is plunged in the history of Algiers, raving about one Fromentin, learning Spanish even! The wonderful purity and warmth of the air seem to have relieved the larynx greatly. He breathes and speaks much more easily than when we left London. I sometimes feel when I look at him as though in this as in all else he were unlike the common sons of men — as though to *him* it might be possible to subdue even this fell disease.'

Elsmere himself wrote: —

'"I had not heard the half" — O Flaxman! An enchanted land — air, sun, warmth, roses, orange blossoms, new potatoes, green peas, veiled Eastern beauties, domed mosques and preaching Mahdis — everything that feeds the outer and the inner man. To throw the window open at waking to the depth of sunlit air between us and the curve of the bay, is for the moment heaven! One's soul seems to escape one, to pour itself into the luminous blue of the morning. I am better — I breathe again.

'Mary flourishes exceedingly. She lives mostly on oranges, and has been adopted by sixty nuns who inhabit the convent over the way, and sell us the most delicious butter and cream. I imagine, if she were a trifle older, her mother would hardly view the proceedings of these dear berosaried women with so much equanimity.

'As for Rose, she writes more letters than Clarissa, and receives more than an editor of the *Times*. I have the strongest views, as you know, as to the vanity of letter-writing. There was a time when you shared them, but there are circumstances and conjunctures, alas! in which no man can be sure of his friend or his friend's principles. Kind friend, good fellow, go often to Elgood Street. Tell me everything about everybody. It is possible, after all, that I may live to come back to them.'

But a week later, alas! the letters fell into a very different strain. The weather had changed, had turned indeed damp and rainy, the natives of course declaring that such gloom and storm in January had never been known before. Edmondson wrote in discouragement. Elsmere had had a touch of cold, had been confined to bed, and almost speechless. His letter was full of medical detail, from which Flaxman gathered that, in spite of the rally of the first ten days, it was clear that the disease was attacking constantly fresh tissue. 'He is very depressed too,' said Edmondson; 'I have never seen him so yet. He sits and looks at us in the evening sometimes with eyes that wring one's heart. It is as though, after having for a moment allowed himself to hope, he found it a doubly hard task to submit.'

Ah, that depression! It was the last eclipse through which a radiant soul was called to pass; but while it lasted it was black indeed. The implacable reality, obscured at first by the emotion and excitement of farewells, and then by a brief spring of hope and returning vigour, showed itself now in all its stern naked-

ness — sat down, as it were, eye to eye with Elsmere —immoveable, ineluctable. There were certain features of the disease itself which were specially trying to such a nature. The long silences it enforced were so unlike him, seemed already to withdraw him so pitifully from their yearning grasp! In these dark days he would sit crouching over the wood fire in the little salon, or lie drawn to the window looking out on the rainstorms bowing the ilexes or scattering the meshes of clematis, silent, almost always gentle, but turning sometimes on Catherine, or on Mary playing at his feet, eyes which, as Edmondson said, 'wrung the heart.'

But in reality, under the husband's depression, and under the wife's inexhaustible devotion, a combat was going on, which reached no third person, but was throughout poignant and tragic to the highest degree. Catherine was making her last effort, Robert his last stand. As we know, ever since that passionate submission of the wife which had thrown her morally at her husband's feet, there had lingered at the bottom of her heart one last supreme hope. All persons of the older Christian type attribute a special importance to the moment of death. While the man of science looks forward to his last hour as a moment of certain intellectual weakness, and calmly warns his friends beforehand that he is to be judged by the utterances of health and not by those of physical collapse, the Christian believes that on the confines of eternity the veil of flesh shrouding the soul grows thin and transparent, and that the glories and the truths of Heaven are visible with a special clearness and authority to

the dying. It was for this moment, either in herself or in him, that Catherine's unconquerable faith had been patiently and dumbly waiting. Either she would go first, and death would wing her poor last words to him with a magic and power not their own; or, when he came to leave her, the veil of doubt would fall away perforce from a spirit as pure as it was humble, and the eternal light, the light of the Crucified, shine through.

Probably, if there had been no breach in Robert's serenity, Catherine's poor last effort would have been much feebler, briefer, more hesitating. But when she saw him plunged for a short space in mortal discouragement, in a sombreness that as the days went on had its points and crests of feverish irritation, her anguished pity came to the help of her creed. Robert felt himself besieged, driven within the citadel, her being urging, grappling with his. In little half-articulate words and ways, in her attempts to draw him back to some of their old religious books and prayers, in those kneeling vigils he often found her maintaining at night beside him, he felt a persistent attack which nearly — in his weakness — overthrew him.

For 'reason and thought grow tired like muscles and nerves.' Some of the greatest and most daring thinkers of the world have felt this pitiful longing to be at one with those who love them, at whatever cost, before the last farewell. And the simpler Christian faith has still to create around it those venerable associations and habits which buttress individual feebleness and diminish the individual effort.

One early February morning, just before dawn,

Robert stretched out his hand for his wife and found her kneeling beside him. The dim mingled light showed him her face vaguely — her clasped hands, her eyes. He looked at her in silence, she at him; there seemed to be a strange shock as of battle between them. Then he drew her head down to him.

'Catherine,' he said to her in a feeble intense whisper, 'would you leave me without comfort, without help, at the end?'

'Oh, my beloved!' she cried, under her breath, throwing her arms round him, 'if you would but stretch out your hand to the true comfort — the true help — the Lamb of God sacrificed for us!'

He stroked her hair tenderly.

'My weakness might yield — my true best self never. I know Whom I have believed. Oh, my darling, be content! Your misery, your prayers hold me back from God — from that truth and that trust which can alone be honestly mine. Submit, my wife! Leave me in God's hands.'

She raised her head. His eyes were bright with fever, his lips trembling, his whole look heavenly. She bowed herself again with a quiet burst of tears, and an indescribable self-abasement. They had had their last struggle, and once more he had conquered! Afterwards the cloud lifted from him. Depression and irritation disappeared. It seemed to her often as though he lay already on the breast of God; even her wifely love grew timid and awestruck.

Yet he did not talk much of immortality, of reunion. It was like a scrupulous child that dares not take for granted more than its father has allowed it to know.

At the same time, it was plain to those about him that the only realities to him in a world of shadows were God — love — the soul.

One day he suddenly caught Catherine's hands, drew her face to him, and studied it with his glowing and hollow eyes, as though he would draw it into his soul.

'He made it,' he said hoarsely, as he let her go — 'this love — this yearning. And in life He only makes us yearn that He may satisfy. He cannot lead us to the end and disappoint the craving He Himself set in us. No, no — could you — could I — do it? And He, the source of love, of justice —'

Flaxman arrived a few days afterwards. Edmondson had started for London the night before, leaving Elsmere better again, able to drive and even walk a little, and well looked after by a local doctor of ability. As Flaxman, tramping up behind his carriage, climbed the long hill to El Biar, he saw the whole marvellous place in a white light of beauty — the bay, the city, the mountains, olive-yard and orange-grove, drawn in pale tints on luminous air. Suddenly, at the entrance of a steep and narrow lane, he noticed a slight figure standing — a parasol against the sun.

'We thought you would like to be shown the short cut up the hill,' said Rose's voice, strangely demure and shy. 'The man can drive round.'

A grip of the hand, a word to the driver, and they were alone in the high-walled lane, which was really the old road up the hill, before the French brought zigzags and civilisation. She gave him news of Robert — better than he had expected. Under the influence

of one of the natural reactions that wait on illness, the girl's tone was cheerful, and Flaxman's spirits rose. They talked of the splendour of the day, the discomforts of the steamer, the picturesqueness of the landing — of anything and everything but the hidden something which was responsible for the dancing brightness in his eyes, the occasional swift veiling of her own.

Then, at an angle of the lane, where a little spring ran cool and brown into a moss-grown trough, where the blue broke joyously through the grey cloud of olive-wood, where not a sight or sound was to be heard of all the busy life which hides and nestles along the hill, he stopped, his hands seizing hers.

'How long?' he said, flushing, his light overcoat falling back from his strong, well-made frame; 'from August to February — how long?'

No more! It was most natural, nay, inevitable. For the moment death stood aside and love asserted itself. But this is no place to chronicle what it said.

And he had hardly asked, and she had hardly yielded, before the same misgiving, the same shrinking, seized on the lovers themselves. They sped up the hill, they crept into the house, far apart. It was agreed that neither of them should say a word.

But, with that extraordinarily quick perception that sometimes goes with such a state as his, Elsmere had guessed the position of things before he and Flaxman had been half an hour together. He took a boyish pleasure in making his friend confess himself, and, when Flaxman left him, at once sent for Catherine and told her.

Catherine, coming out afterwards, met Flaxman in the little tiled hall. How she had aged and blanched! She stood a moment opposite to him, in her plain long dress with its white collar and cuffs, her face working a little.

'We are so glad!' she said, but almost with a sob — 'God bless you!'

And, wringing his hand, she passed away from him, hiding her eyes, but without a sound. When they met again she was quite self-contained and bright, talking much both with him and Rose about the future.

And one little word of Rose's must be recorded here, for those who have followed her through these four years. It was at night, when Robert, with smiles, had driven them out of doors to look at the moon over the bay, from the terrace just beyond the windows. They had been sitting on the balustrade talking of Elsmere. In this nearness to death, Rose had lost her mocking ways; but she was shy and difficult, and Flaxman felt it all very strange, and did not venture to woo her much.

When, all at once, he felt her hand steal trembling, a little white suppliant, into his, and her face against his shoulder.

'You won't — you won't ever be angry with me for making you wait like that? It was impertinent — it was like a child playing tricks!'

Flaxman was deeply shocked by the change in Robert. He was terribly emaciated. They could only talk at rare intervals in the day, and it was clear that

his nights were often one long struggle for breath. But his spirits were extraordinarily even, and his days occupied to a point Flaxman could hardly have believed. He would creep downstairs at eleven, read his English letters (among them always some from Elgood Street), write his answers to them — those difficult scrawls are among the treasured archives of a society which is fast gathering to itself some of the best life in England — then often fall asleep with fatigue. After food there would come a short drive, or, if the day was very warm, an hour or two of sitting outside, generally his best time for talking. He had a wheeled chair in which Flaxman would take him across to the convent garden — a dream of beauty. Overhead an orange canopy — leaf and blossom and golden fruit all in simultaneous perfection; underneath a revel of every imaginable flower — narcissus and anemones, geraniums and clematis; and all about, hedges of monthly roses, dark red and pale alternately, making a rose-leaf carpet under their feet. Through the tree-trunks shone the white sun-warmed convent, and far beyond were glimpses of downward-trending valleys edged by twinkling sea.

Here, sensitive and receptive to his last hour, Elsmere drank in beauty and delight; talking, too, whenever it was possible to him, of all things in heaven and earth. Then, when he came home, he would have out his books and fall to some old critical problem — his worn and scored Greek Testament always beside him, the quick eye making its way through some new monograph or other, the parched lips opening every now and then to call Flaxman's attention to some fresh

light on an obscure point — only to relinquish the effort again and again with an unfailing patience.

But though he would begin as ardently as ever, he could not keep his attention fixed to these things very long. Then it would be the turn of his favourite poets — Wordsworth, Tennyson, Virgil. Virgil perhaps most frequently. Flaxman would read the Æneid aloud to him, Robert following the passages he loved best in a whisper, his hand resting the while in Catherine's. And then Mary would be brought in, and he would lie watching her while she played.

'I have had a letter,' he said to Flaxman one afternoon, 'from a Broad Church clergyman in the Midlands, who imagines me to be still militant in London, protesting against the "absurd and wasteful isolation" of the New Brotherhood. He asks me why instead of leaving the Church I did not join the Church Reform Union, why I did not attempt to widen the Church from within, and why we in Elgood Street are not now in organic connexion with the new Broad Church settlement in East London. I believe I have written him rather a sharp letter; I could not help it. It was borne in on me to tell him that it is all owing to him and his brethren that we are in the muddle we are in to-day. Miracle is to our time what the law was to the early Christians. We *must* make up our minds about it one way or the other. And if we decide to throw it over as Paul threw over the law, then we must *fight* as he did. There is no help in subterfuge, no help in anything but a perfect sincerity. We must come out of it. The ground must be cleared; then may come the rebuilding. Religion itself, the peace of generations

to come, is at stake. If we could wait indefinitely while the Church widened, well and good. But we have but the one life, the one chance of saying the word or playing the part assigned us.'

On another occasion, in the convent garden, he broke out with —

'I often lie here, Flaxman, wondering at the way in which men become the slaves of some metaphysical word — *personality*, or *intelligence*, or what not! What meaning can they have as applied to *God?* Herbert Spencer is quite right. We no sooner attempt to define what we mean by a Personal God than we lose ourselves in labyrinths of language and logic. But why attempt it at all? I like that French saying, "*Quand on me demande ce que c'est que Dieu, je l'ignore; quand on ne me le demande pas, je le sais très-bien!*" No, we cannot realise Him in words — we can only live in Him, and die to Him!'

On another occasion, he said, speaking to Catherine of the squire and of Meyrick's account of his last year of life: —

'How selfish one is, *always* — when one least thinks it! How could I have forgotten him so completely as I did during all that New Brotherhood time? Where, what is he now? Ah! if somewhere, somehow, one could —'

He did not finish the sentence, but the painful yearning of his look finished it for him.

But the days passed on, and the voice grew rarer, the strength feebler. By the beginning of March all coming downstairs was over. He was entirely confined to his room, almost to his bed. Then there came a

horrible week, when no narcotics took effect, when every night was a wrestle for life, which it seemed must be the last. They had a good nurse, but Flaxman and Catherine mostly shared the watching between them.

One morning he had just dropped into a fevered sleep. Catherine was sitting by the window gazing out into a dawn-world of sun which reminded her of the summer sunrises at Petites Dalles. She looked the shadow of herself. Spiritually, too, she was the shadow of herself. Her life was no longer her own: she lived in him — in every look of those eyes — in every movement of that wasted frame.

As she sat there, her Bible on her knee, her strained unseeing gaze resting on the garden and the sea, a sort of hallucination took possession of her. It seemed to her that she saw the form of the Son of man passing over the misty slope in front of her, that the dim majestic figure turned and beckoned. In her half-dream she fell on her knees. 'Master!' she cried in agony, 'I cannot leave him! Call me not! My life is here. I have no heart — it beats in his.'

And the figure passed on, the beckoning hand dropping at its side. She followed it with a sort of anguish, but it seemed to her as though mind and body were alike incapable of moving — that she would not if she could. Then suddenly a sound from behind startled her. She turned, her trance shaken off in an instant, and saw Robert sitting up in bed.

For a moment her lover, her husband, of the early days was before her — as she ran to him. But he did not see her.

An ecstasy of joy was on his face; the whole man bent forward listening.

*'The child's cry! — thank God! Oh! Meyrick — Catherine — thank God!'*

And she knew that he stood again on the stairs at Murewell in that September night which gave them their first-born, and that he thanked God because her pain was over.

An instant's strained looking, and, sinking back into her arms, he gave two or three gasping breaths, and died.

Five days later Flaxman and Rose brought Catherine home. It was supposed that she would return to her mother at Burwood. Instead, she settled down again in London, and not one of those whom Robert Elsmere had loved was forgotten by his widow. Every Sunday morning, with her child beside her, she worshipped in the old ways; every Sunday afternoon saw her black-veiled figure sitting motionless in a corner of the Elgood Street Hall. In the week she gave all her time and money to the various works of charity which he had started. But she held her peace. Many were grateful to her; some loved her; none understood her. She lived for one hope only; and the years passed all too slowly.

The New Brotherhood still exists, and grows. There are many who imagined that as it had been raised out of the earth by Elsmere's genius, so it would sink with him. Not so! He would have fought the struggle to victory with surpassing force, with a brilliancy and rapidity none after him could rival. But the struggle

was not his. His effort was but a fraction of the effort of the race. In that effort, and in the Divine force behind it, is our trust, as was his.

> 'Others, I doubt not, if not we,
> The issue of our toils shall see;
> And (they forgotten and unknown)
> Young children gather as their own
> The harvest that the dead had sown.'

THE END

# APPENDIX

# APPENDIX I

## CONVERSATION WITH MR. GLADSTONE ON *ROBERT ELSMERE*, APRIL 8, 1888

*Notes taken immediately afterwards*

I ARRIVED at Keble at 7.10. Gladstone was not in the drawing-room. I waited for about three minutes, when I heard his slow step coming downstairs. He came in with a candle in his hand which he put out, then he came up most cordially and quickly. 'Mrs. Ward — this is most good of you to come and see me! If you had not come, I should myself have ventured to call and ask after yourself and Mr. Arnold.'

Then he sat down, he on a small uncomfortable chair, where he fidgeted greatly! He began to ask about Mamma. Had there been much suffering? Was death peaceful? I told him. He said that though he had seen many deaths, he had never seen any really peaceful. In all there had been much struggle. So much so that 'I myself have conceived what I will not call a terror of death, but a repugnance from the idea of death. It is the rending asunder of body and soul, the tearing apart of the two elements of our nature, — for I hold the body to be an essential element as well as the soul, not a mere sheath or envelope.' He instanced the death of Sidney Herbert as an exception. *He* had said, 'Can this indeed be dying?' death had come so gently.

Then after a pause he began to speak of the knowledge of Oxford shown by *Robert Elsmere*, and we went on to discuss the past and present state of Oxford. He mentioned it as 'one of the few points on which, outside Home Rule, I disagree with Hutton'; that Hutton had given it as his opinion that Cardinal Newman and Matthew Arnold had had more influence than any other men on modern Oxford. Newman's influence had been supreme up to 1845, — nothing since, and he had gathered from Oxford men that Professor Jowett and Mr. Green had counted for much more than Matthew Arnold. M. A.'s had been an influence on the general public, not on the Universities. How Oxford

had been torn and rent, what a 'long agony of thought' she had gone through! How different from Cambridge!

Then we talked again of Newman, how he had possessed the place, his influence comparable only to that of Abelard on Paris — the flatness after he left. I quoted Burne-Jones on the subject. Then I spoke of Pattison's autobiography as illustrating Newman's hold. He agreed, but said that Pattison's religious phase was so disagreeable and unattractive that it did small credit to Newman. He would much like to have seen more of the Autobiography, but he understood that the personalities were too strong. I asked him if he had seen Pattison's last 'Confession of Faith,' which Mrs. Pattison decided not to print, in MS. He said no. Then he asked me whether I had pleasant remembrances of Pattison. I warmly said yes, and described how kind he had been to me as a girl. 'Ah!' he said, 'Dean Church would never cast him off; and Church is almost the only person of whom he really speaks kindly in the Memoirs.'

Then, from the state of Oxford, we passed to the state of the country during the last half-century. 'It has been a *wonderful* half-century! I often tell the young men who are coming on that we have had a better time than they can have, in the next half-century. Take one thing only, — the abolition of slavery in the world [outside Africa I suppose he meant]. You are too young to realise what that means. But I draw a distinction between the first twenty-five years of the period and the second; during the first, steady advance throughout all classes, during the second, distinct recession, and retrogression, in the highest class of all. That testing-point, *marriage*, very disquieting. The scandals about marriage in the last twenty years unparalleled in the first half of the period. I don't trust my own opinion, but I asked two of the keenest social observers, and two of the coolest heads I ever knew — Lord Granville and the late Lord Clanwilliam — to tell me what they thought, and they strongly confirmed my impression.' Here one of the Talbot boys came in and stood by the fire, and Gladstone glanced at him once or twice, as though conversation on these points was difficult while he was there. I suggested that more was made of scandals nowadays by the newspapers. But he would not have it. 'When I was a boy, — I left Eton in 1827, — there were two papers, the *Age* and the

*Satirist*, worse than anything which exists now. But they died out about 1830, and for about 40 years there was *nothing of the kind*. Then sprang up this odious and deplorable crop of Society papers.' He thought the fact significant.

He talked of the modern girl. 'They tell me she is not what she was — that she loves to be fast. I don't know. All I can bear testimony to is the girl of my youth. *She* was excellent!'

'But,' I asked him, 'in spite of all drawbacks, do you not see a gradual growth and diffusion of earnestness, of the social passion, during the whole period?' He assented, and added, 'With the decline of the Church and State spirit, with the slackening of State religion, there has unquestionably come about a quickening of the State conscience, of the *social* conscience. I will not say what inference should be drawn.'

Then we spoke of charity in London, and of the way in which the rich districts had elbowed out their poor. And thereupon, perhaps through talk of the *motives* for charitable work — we came to religion. 'I don't believe in any new system,' he said, smiling, and with reference to *Robert Elsmere*. 'I cling to the old. The great traditions are what attract me. I believe in a degeneracy of man, in the Fall, — in *sin* — in the intensity and virulence of sin. No other religion but Christianity meets the sense of sin, and sin is the great fact in the world to me.'

I suggested that though I did not wish for a moment to deny the existence of moral evil, the more one thought of it the more plain became its connexion with physical and social and therefore *removeable* conditions. He disagreed, saying that the worst forms of evil seemed to him to belong to the highest and most favoured class 'of educated people,' — with some emphasis.

I asked him whether it did not give him any confidence in 'a new system' — i. e. a new construction of Christianity — to watch its effect on such a life as T. H. Green's. He replied, individuals were no test; one must take the broad mass. Some men were born 'so that sin never came near them. Such men never felt the need of Christianity. They would be better if they were worse!'

And as to difficulties, the great difficulties of all lay in the way of Theism. 'I am surprised at men who don't feel this — I am surprised at you!' he said, smiling. Newman had put these diffi-

culties so powerfully in the *Apologia*. The Christian system satisfied all the demands of the conscience; and as to the intellectual difficulties, — well, there we came to the question of miracles.

Here he restated the old argument against an *a priori* impossibility of miracles. Granted a God, it is absurd to limit the scope and range of the *will* of such a being. I agreed; then I asked him to let me tell him how I had approached the question, — through a long immersion in documents of the early Church, in critical and historical questions connected with miracles. I had come to see how miracle arises, and to feel it impossible to draw the line with any rigidity between one miraculous story and another.

'The difficulty is,' he said slowly, 'if you sweep away miracles, you sweep away *the Resurrection!* With regard to the other miracles, I no longer feel as I once did that they are the most essential evidence for Christianity. The evidence which now comes *nearest* to me is the evidence of Christian history, of the type of character Christianity has produced.'

Here the Talbots' supper-bell rang, and the clock struck eight. He said in the most cordial way it was impossible it could be so late, that he must not put the Warden's household out, but that our conversation could not end there, and would I come again? We settled 9.30 in the morning. He thanked me, came with me to the hall and bade me a most courteous and friendly good-bye.

On the following morning Mr. Gladstone and I talked again for nearly two hours, coming a good deal nearer to the real question in debate between us, — i. e. the nature and historical value of the earliest Christian evidence. Of this later and longer half of the conversation I have unfortunately no contemporary notes, and have given what I remember of it in the Introduction.

# APPENDIX II

In the spring of 1871, M. Taine came to Oxford to give some lectures at the Taylorian. I met him at Balliol, under the master's roof, and retained a vivid recollection of his kindness and charm. After *Robert Elsmere's* success, I sent it to him, recalling our meeting in that disastrous moment of his country's history, seventeen years before. His letter of acknowledgement renewed our acquaintance, and during the few remaining years of M. Taine's life we saw something of him and of Madame Taine both in London and Paris. The brilliance of Madame Taine's 'Thursdays,' where half literary and artistic Paris was to be met, — M. Paul Bourget, especially, at the height of his fame as a talker, — will long linger in the mind of a shy English visitor, to whom the French ease, and readiness of mind, seemed the most enviable, the most miraculous thing! In later years, and after M. Taine's, death, I came to know Madame Taine better. She was one of the noblest and most loveable of women, fit companion for the high-minded scholar, whose letters have been given to us by her care, and that of M. Taine's distinguished nephew M. André Chevrillon.

Paris, 1er février, 1889.

Madame, —

Je suis très honoré et très reconnaissant du cadeau que vous avez bien voulu me faire. Les deux photographies de Westmoreland y ajoutent un nouveau prix. L'auteur de *Robert Elsmere* est un des premiers qui aient montré, par des touches délicates et justes, l'atavisme et l'influence du milieu héréditaire, le fil qui rattache l'enfant à ses ancêtres éloignés, à sa race, aux habitudes physiques et morales créés par le sol et l'atmosphère; Robert, comme Catherine, est bien l'enfant de ses parents et grand-parents, dans les deux lignes. Il y a là une veine nouvelle de psychologie; l'auteur l'a découverte et suivie, et ce n'est pas là le moindre de ses grands mérites.

L'article des *Débats* a semblé à tout le monde inexact, superficiel et faux. A mon sens, le roman en question est supérieur à tous ceux qui ont paru en Angleterre depuis George Eliot, et il l'emporte sur ceux d'Eliot en ce qu'il traite expressément l'un des

deux problèmes capitaux du siècle; la transformation graduelle du christianisme. De plus la solution qu'il en donne est possible et même plausible; on ne peut lui demander davantage. Il n'est pas convertisseur, et son opinion ou préférence personnelle, quoique suffisament indiquée, est sur l'arriere-plan; elle n'intervient pas, comme dans *Sibylle* d'Octave Feuillet, ou comme dans *Mlle. de la Quintinie* par George Sand, pour diminuer la vérité et subordonner l'intérêt humain à une thèse préconçue. En somme, si l'on cherche le *credo* de l'auteur, on peut lui attribuer celui de Grey aussi bien que celui de Robert.

J'avais cru à des coupures parce que la mère de Catherine et sa sœur Agnès sont des figures tout à fait effacées à partir du second volume. Rose au contraire prend une grande place; il m'avait semblé que son épisode appelait comme contre-poids un épisode différent et correspondant, c'est-à-dire l'histoire d'Agnès. De même le futur mari de Rose me paraissait incomplet, et bien vite introduit; quant au squire, c'est un personnage admirable, si combattant et si ravagé, que j'ai regretté la brièveté de son histoire finale; il s'est passé, pendant les derniers mois, une étrange tragédie dans cette âme; l'auteur était digne de la raconter en détail et avec développement.

Le souvenir que vous daignez rappeler se reforme en moi, avec des contours encore un peu vagues, j'entrevois une jeune fille brune et gracieuse à ce dîner chez le *Master of Balliol*, et Swinburne parmi les convives, en cravate bleu, avec des gestes saccadés et comme désarticulés.

Veuillez, Madame, faire agréer l'hommage de mon admiration à l'auteur de *Robert Elsmere* et agréer vous-même ma gratitude et mon respect.

[H. Taine — *Sa Vie et Sa Correspondance*, vol. II. Hachette et C^ie^. Paris. 1904.]

TRANSLATION

PARIS, 1st February, 1889.

MADAME, —

I am greatly honoured by the present you were good enough to send me, and am very grateful to you. The two photographs of Westmoreland give it added value. The author of 'Robert Elsmere' is one of the first who have shown, by delicate and unerring touches, atavism and the influence of hereditary surround-

ings — the thread that connects the child with his distant forbears, with his race, with the physical and moral characteristics created by the soil and the atmosphere. Robert, like Catherine, is unmistakeably the child of his parents and grandparents in both lines. There is in this a new vein of psychology; the author has discovered it and traced it, and that is by no means the least of her merits.

The article in the *Débats* is, in everybody's opinion, inaccurate, superficial, and unwarranted. In my view the novel in question is superior to all that have appeared in England since George Eliot; and it is superior to Eliot's novels in that it treats directly one of the two pressing problems of the age, — the gradual transformation of Christianity. Moreover, the solution that it offers of that problem is possible, even plausible; we can ask nothing more of it. The book is not of the proselytising sort, and its opinion, or personal preference, although indicated clearly enough, is kept in the background; it does not intrude itself, as in Octave Feuillet's 'Sibylle,' or as in George Sand's 'Mademoiselle de la Quintinie,' to lessen the verisimilitude and subordinate the human interest to a preconceived thesis. In fact, if one seeks the author's *credo*, one may as logically attribute Grey's to her as Robert's.

I had supposed that there had been some cutting, because Catherine's mother and her sister Agnes disappear altogether in the second volume. Rose, on the contrary, assumes a prominent position; it seemed to me that her episode demanded, as a counterpoise, a contrasted, complementary episode — that is to say, the story of Agnes. In like manner Rose's future husband seemed to me incomplete and hastily introduced; as for the Squire, he is an admirable character, so combative and storm-tossed that I regretted the brevity of his closing story; during the last months a strange tragedy was enacted in that mind; the author was well fitted to narrate it in detail and to develop it.

The memory to which you deign to appeal is taking shape in my mind, with outlines still a little vague; I see a dark, graceful young lady at that dinner at the Master of Balliol's, and Swinburne among the guests, in a blue cravat, with jerky, and as it were, disjointed gestures.

Pray, Madame, convey my homage to the author of 'Robert Elsmere,' and accept for yourself my gratitude and respect.

# APPENDIX III

THIS Dialogue was printed in *The Nineteenth Century* for January, 1889. It was intended partly as an answer to Mr. Gladstone's article on 'Robert Elsmere' in the same review, May, 1888, partly as a reply to a paper on the book in the *Contemporary*, by Canon Randall Davidson, now Archbishop of Canterbury. Mr. Gladstone's article was reprinted in America and widely circulated. In England it was republished among his 'New Gleanings,' 1890.

## THE NEW REFORMATION

### A DIALOGUE

IN a sitting-room belonging to a corner house in one of the streets running from the Strand to the Embankment, a young man sat reading on a recent winter afternoon. Behind him was an old-fashioned semi-circular window, through which the broad grey line of the river, the shipping on its stream, and the dark masses of building on the opposite shore could be as plainly seen as the fading light permitted. But a foggy evening was stealing rapidly on, and presently the young man dropped his book, and betook himself to his pipe, supplemented by a dreamy study of the fire. A sound was heard in the little hall downstairs; the reader started up, went to the door, and listened; but all was quiet again, and he returned to his chair. As he moved he showed a figure, tall, and possessed of a certain slouching, broad-shouldered power. The hair was noticeably black, and curled closely over the head. The features were strongly cut, dashed in, a little by accident, as it seemed, so that only the mouth had fallen finely into drawing. But through the defects of the face, as through the student's stoop of the powerful frame, there breathed an attractive and vigorous individuality. You saw a man all alive, marked already by the intensity with which he had plied his trade, and curiously combining in his outward aspect the suggestions of a patient tenacity with those of a quick and irritable susceptibility.

'I must wait for him, I suppose,' he said to himself, as he re-

sumed his seat. 'I wish it were over. Come here, Tony, and support me.'

The Aberdeen terrier on the rug got up slowly, sleepily blinked at his master, and climbed into the chair beside him, where he had hardly established himself, after a long process of leisurely fidgeting, when the hall-door bell rang in good earnest, and Tony, hastily driven down, was left to meditate on the caprices of power.

His master threw open the door.

'Well, how are you, my dear old fellow?' said the new-comer. 'I thought I never should get here. The lunch at Lambeth was interminable, and one saw so many people there whom one knew a little, and was glad to talk to, that even after lunch it was impossible to cut it short. But how are you? How glad I am to see you!'

And the speaker advanced into the room, still holding the other's hand affectionately. He was a slightly-built man, in a clerical coat, with a long narrow face and piercing eyes. The whole aspect was singularly refined; all the lines were thin and prematurely worn; but the expression was sparkling and full of charm, and the strong priestly element in dress and manner clearly implied no lack of pliancy of mind, of sensitiveness and elasticity of feeling.

'Sit down there,' said the owner of the rooms, putting the new-comer into the chair he himself had just vacated. 'Tony — you impudence! — out of that! Really, that dog and I have been living so long by ourselves that *his* manners, at any rate, are past praying for — and I should be sorry to answer for my own.'

'Well, and where have you been all this time, Merriman?' said the man in the chair, looking up at his companion with an expression in which a very strong and evident pleasure seemed to be crossed by something else. 'Two years, is n't it, since we parted at Oxford, and since I went off to my first curacy? And not a line from you since — not one — not even an address on a postcard, till I heard from you that you would be in town to-day. Do you call that decent behaviour, sir, to an old friend?'

'It is explainable, I think,' said the other awkwardly, and paused. 'But, however — So you, Ronalds, are still at Mickledown, and it is your vicar Raynham who has been consecrated to-day to this new South African see?'

'Yes,' said Ronalds, with a sigh. 'Yes, it is a heavy loss to us

all. If ever there was a true and effective Churchman, it is Raynham. It is hard to spare a man like that from the work here. However, he is absolutely guileless and self-sacrificing, and I like to believe that he knows best. But yourself, Merriman; you seem to forget that it is *you* who are the riddle and the mystery! It is nearly two years ago, is n't it, since you wrote to tell me you had postponed your ordination for the purpose of spending some time in Germany, and going through further theological training? But as to your whereabouts in Germany I have been quite in the dark. Explain, old fellow.'

And the speaker put up his hand and touched his companion's arm. Look and action were equally winning, and expressed the native inborn loveableness of the man.

Merriman named a small but famous German university. 'I have been eighteen months there,' he added briefly, his quick eye taking note of the shade which had fallen across his companion's expression. 'I have had a splendid time.'

'And have come back — what for?'

'To eat dinners and go to the Bar.'

Ronalds started.

'So the old dream is given up?' he said slowly. 'How we used to cherish it together! When did you make up your mind to relinquish the Church?'

'Some eight or nine months ago.'

The speaker paused a moment, then went on: 'That is why I did not write to you, Ronalds. At first I was too undecided, too overwhelmed by new ideas; and then, afterwards, I knew you would be distressed, so I let it alone till we should meet.'

Ronalds lay back in his chair, sheltering his eyes from the blaze of the fire with one hand. He did not speak for a minute or two; then he said, in a somewhat constrained voice, —

'Is G—— one of their — what shall I call it? — liberal — advanced — universities?'

'Not particularly. The mass of students in the theological faculty there are on the road to being Lutheran pastors of a highly orthodox kind, and find plenty of professors to suit them. I was attracted by the reputation of a group of men, whose books are widely read, indeed, but whose lecture-rooms are very scantily filled. It seemed to me that in their teaching I should find that *historical* temper which I was above all in search of. You remem-

ber' — and the speaker threw back his head with a smile which pleasantly illumined the massive irregular features — 'how you used to laugh at me for a Teutophile — how that history prize of mine on Teutonic Arianism plunged me into quagmires of German you used to make merry over, and wherein, according to you, I had dropped for ever all chances of a decent English style. Well, it was nothing but that experience of German methods, working together with all the religious ideas of which my mind and yours had been full for so long, that made me put off orders and go abroad. I think,' he added slowly, 'I was athirst to see what Germans, like those whose work on the fifth and sixth centuries had struck me with admiration, could make of the first and second centuries. I was full of problems and questionings. The historical work which I had begun so casually seemed to have roused a host of new forces and powers. I was unhappy. The old and the new would n't blend — would n't fuse. I was especially worried with that problem of *historical translation*, if I may call it so, which had risen up before me like a ghost out of all those interminable German books about the Goths, in which I had buried myself. My ghost walked. It touched matters I tried in vain to keep sacred from it. Finally it drove me out of England.'

A new flame of fire had wakened in the black, half-shut eyes. With such a growth of animation might Richard Rothe have described the tumults of heart and mind which drove him from Germany southwards into the land of art, from Würtemberg to Rome, from the narrow thought-world of Lutheran Pietism into the wide horizons of a humaner faith.

'Historical *translation!*' said the other, looking up. 'What do you mean by that?'

'Simply the transmutation of past witness into the language of the present. That was the point, the problem, which seized me from the beginning. Here, for instance, in my work among the Goths, I had before me a mass of original material — chronicles, ecclesiastical biographies, acts of councils, lives of saints, papal letters, religious polemics, and so forth. And I had also before me two different kinds of modern treatment of it, an older and a newer; the older represented by books written — what shall we say? — broadly speaking, before 1840; the newer by a series of works produced, of course, in the light of Niebuhr and Ranke, and differing altogether in tone from the earlier series. What *was*

this difference in tone? Of course, we all know — in spite of Gibbon — that history has been reborn since the Revolution. Yes; but why? how? Put the development into words. Well, it seemed to me like nothing in the world so much as the difference between good and bad translation. The older books had had certain statements and products of the past to render into the language of the present. And they had rendered them inadequately with that vagueness and generality and convention which belong to bad translation. And the result was either merely flat and perfunctory, something totally without the breath of life and reality, or else the ideas and speech of the past were hidden away under what was in truth a disguise — often a magnificent disguise — woven out of the ideas and speech of the present. But the books since Niebuhr, since Ranke, since Mommsen! *There* you found a difference. At last you found out that these men and women, these kings and bishops and saints, these chroniclers and officials, were flesh and blood; that they had ideas, passions, politics; that they lived, as we do, under governing prepossessions; that they had theories of life and the universe; and till you understood these and could throw yourself back into them, you had no chance of understanding the men or their doings. The past woke up, lived and moved, and what it said came to you with a new accent, the accent of truth. And all this was brought about by nothing in the world fundamentally but *improved translation*, by the use of that same faculty, half scientific, half imaginative, which in the rendering of a foreign language enables a man to get into the very heart and mind of his author, to speak with his tones and feel with his feeling.'

The speaker paused a moment as though to rein himself up. Ronalds looked at him, smiling at the strenuous attitude — hands on sides, head thrown back — which seemed to recall many bygone moments to the spectator.

'If you mean by all this,' he said, 'that the modern historian throws less of himself into his work, shows more real detachment of mind than his predecessors, I can bring half a dozen instances against you. When is Carlyle anybody but Carlyle, fitting the whole of history to the clothes and force philosophy?'

'Oh, the subjective element, of course, is inevitable to some degree or other. But, in truth, paradox as it may sound, it is just this heightened individuality in the modern historian which

makes him in many ways a better interpreter of the past. He is more sympathetic, more eager, more curious, more *romantic*, if you will; and, at the same time, the scientific temper, which is the twin sister of the romantic — and both the peculiar children of to-day — is always there to guide his eagerness, to instruct his curiosity, to discipline his sympathy. He understands the past better, because he carries more of the present into it than those who went before, because the culture of *this* present provides him with sharper and more ingenious tools wherewith to reconstruct the building of the past, and because, by virtue of a trained and developed imagination, he is able nowadays to live in the life, physical and moral, of the bygone streets and temples, the long dead men and women, brought to light again by his knowledge and his skill, to a degree and in a manner unknown to any century but ours.'

'Well said!' exclaimed Ronalds, smiling again. 'Modern history has earned its pæan — far be it from me to grudge it.'

'Ah! I run on,' said the other penitently, the arms falling and the attitude relaxing. 'But to return to myself, if you really want the explanation —'

And he looked inquiringly at his friend.

'I want it,' said Ronalds in a low voice. 'But I dread it.'

Merriman paused a moment, his keen black eyes resting on his friend. Then he said gently, —

'I will say no more if it would be painful to you. And yet should like to explain myself. You influenced me a great deal at Oxford. I doubt if I should ever have thought of taking orders but for you. Constantly in Germany my mind turned to you with a sense of responsibility. I could not write, but I always looked forward to talking it out.'

'Go on, go on,' said Ronalds, looking up at him. 'I wish to understand — if I can.'

'Well, then, you remember that, during the time I was hunting up Goths, I had to break off divinity lectures. But the day after the prize was sent in I remember gathering together the old books again, and I took up specially Edersheim's *Jesus the Messiah*, which Haigh of Trinity had lent me some weeks before. I read it for hours, and at the end I laid it down with an inward judgement the strength of which I shall never forget. "Learning up to a certain point, feeling up to a certain point, but all through bad his-

tory — *bad translation!*" Six months before, I should have been incapable of any such verdict. But my Germans, with their vile type and their abominable style, had taught me a good deal in between. If Edersheim's ways of using documents and conceiving history were right, then theirs were all wrong. But I knew them, on the contrary, to be abundantly right — at any rate within their own sphere. *Must* the Christian documents be treated differently — *could* they be treated differently, in principle — from the documents of the declining Empire, or of any other historical period? That evening was a kind of crisis. I was never at peace afterwards. I remember turning to books on Inspiration and on the Canon, and resuming attendance on old S——'s lectures on Apologetics, which had been interrupted for me by reading for the Essay. Many times I recollect going to see X—— at Christ Church. He saw I was in difficulties, and talked to me a great deal and very kindly about the impossibility of mere *reason* supplying a solution for any of the prevalent doubts as to Christianity. One must *wish* to believe, or belief was impossible. He quoted Mansel's words to me: "Affection is part of insight; it is wanted for gaining due acquaintance with the facts of the case." All this fitted in very well with the Neo-Kantian ideas I believed myself to have adopted during my reading for Greats; and when he sent me to Mozley, and Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, I followed his advice gladly enough. But the only result was that I found my whole conception of truth fissured and broken up. It came to this, that there were *two* truths — not only a truth of matter and a truth of spirit, but two truths of history, two truths of literary criticism, to which answered corresponding moods of mind on the part of the Christian. It was imperatively right to endeavour to disentangle miracle from history, the marvellous from the real, in a document of the fourth, or third, or second century; to see delusions in the Montanist visions, the growth of myth in Apocryphal gospels, or the Acts of Pilate, a natural credulity in Justin's demonology, careless reporting in the ascription by Papias to Jesus of a gross millenarian prophecy, and so on. But the contents of the New Testament, however marvellous, and however apparently akin to what surrounds them on either side, were to be treated from a totally different point of view. In the one case there must be a desire on the part of the historian to discover the historical under the miraculous, or he would be failing in his duty as a sane and

competent observer; in the other case there must be a desire, a strong "affection," on the part of the theologian, towards proving the miraculous to be historical, or he would be failing in his duty as a Christian. Yet in both cases — the reflexion was inevitable — the evidence was historical and literary, and the witnesses human! — At this point I came across the first volume of Baur's *Church History*. Now, Baur's main theories, you will remember, had been described to us in one or two of S——'s lectures. He had been held up to us as the head and front of the German system-making; the extravagance of his Simon Magus theory, the arbitrariness of his perpetual antitheses between "Petrinismus" and "Paulinismus," "Particularismus" and "Universalismus," had been brought out with a good deal of the dry old Oxford humour, and, naturally, not many of us had kept any thought of Baur in our minds. But now I began to read one of his chief books, and I can only describe what I felt in the words lately attributed by his biographer to Professor Green: "He thought the *Church History* the most *illuminating* book he had ever read." Clearly it was overstrained and arbitrary in parts; the theory was forced, and the arrangement too symmetrical for historical or literary reality. But it seemed to me you might say the same of Niebuhr and Wolff. Yet they had been, and were still, the pioneers and masters of an age. Why not Baur in his line? At any rate it was clear to me that his book was *history;* it fell into line with all other first-rate work in the historical department, whereas, whatever else they might be, Farrar's and Edersheim's were *not* history. That was my first acquaintance with German theology, except some translations of Weiss and Dorner. I had shrunk from it till then, and X—— had warned me from it. But after reading Baur's *Church History* and the *Paul*, I suddenly made up my mind to go abroad, and to give a year at least to the German critical school. Well, so far, Ronalds, do you blame me?'

And the speaker broke off abruptly, his almost excessive calm of manner wavering a little, his eye seeking his friend's.

Ronalds had sat till now shrunken together in the big arm-chair, which, standing out against the uncurtained window, through which came a winter twilight, seemed lost again among the confused lines of the houses on the opposite bank of the river, or of the barges going slowly up stream. He roused himself at this, and bent forward.

'Blame?' — the word had an odd ring — 'that depends. How much did it *cost* you, all this, Merriman?'

'What do you mean?'

'What I say. It gives me a shiver as I listen to you. I foresee the end — a dismal end, all through — and I keep wondering whether you had ever anything to lose, whether you were ever *inside?* If you were, could this process you describe have gone on with so little check, so little reaction?'

The firelight showed a flush on the fine ascetic cheek. He had roused himself to speak strongly, but the effort excited him.

Merriman left his post by the fire and began to pace up and down.

'I had meant only to describe to you,' he said at last, 'an episode of intellectual history. The rest is between me — and God. It cannot really be put into words. But, as you know, I was brought up strictly and religiously. You and I shared the same thoughts, the same influences, the same religious services at Oxford. These months I have been describing to you were months of great misery on the side of feeling and practice. I remember coming back one morning from an early service, and thinking with a kind of despair what would happen to me if I were ever forced to give up the Sacrament. Yet the process went on all the same. I believe it is very much a matter of temperament. I could not master the passionate desire to think the matter through, to harmonise knowledge and faith, to get to the bottom. You might have done it, I think.' And he stood still, looking at his friend with a smile which had no satire in it.

'Of course, every Christian knows that there are doubts and difficulties in the path of the faith, and that he may succumb to them if he pleases,' said Ronalds, after a pause; 'but if he is true he keeps close to his Lord, and gives the answer of faith. He asks himself which solves most problems — Christianity or Agnosticism. He looks round on the state of the world, on the history of his own life, and on the work of Christ in both. Is he going to give up the witness of the faith, of the "holy men of old," of the saints of the present, of his own inmost life, because men of science in a world which is all inexplicable tell him that miracle is impossible, or because a generation or two of German professors — who seem to him to spend most of their time, Penelope-like, in unravelling their own webs — persist, in the face of a living and

Divine reality, which attests itself to him every day of his life, in telling him that the Church is a mere human contrivance based upon a delusion and a lie? Above all, he will not venture himself deliberately, in a state of immaturity and disarmament, into the enemy's camp; for "he is not his own," and what he bears in his bosom, the treasure of the faith, is but confided to him to be guarded with his life.'

The musical vibrating voice sank with the closing words. Merriman returned to his old position by the fire, and was silent a minute.

'But even you,' he said presently, with a smile, 'cannot deny reason some place in your scheme.'

'Naturally,' said the other, his tone of emotion changing for one of sarcasm. 'To the freethinker of to-day we Christians are all sentimentalists — strong in emotion, weak in brains. A religion which boasts in England a Newton, a Hooker, a Butler, and a Newman among its sons, is conceived of as having nothing rational to say for itself. The charge is absurd on the face of it. We say, indeed, that finally — in the last resort — a certain disposition of soul is required for the due apprehension of Christian truth; that the process of apprehension contains an act of faith which cannot be evaded, and that the rationalist who will accept nothing but what his reason can endorse is merely refusing the Divine condition on which God's gift is offered to him. But that a religion which is not justified and ordered by reason is a religion full of danger — is not a religion, indeed, but a mysticism — we know as well as you do, and the English Church needs no one to teach her an elementary lesson. English theology wants no apologist, and the man who has not already gone over to the restlessness of unbelief need not leave his own Church in quest of guides. Will you find more learning in all Germany than you can get in Westcott and Lightfoot? a better historian than Bishop Stubbs? a more omniscient knowledge of the history of criticism and the canon than Dr. Salmon will give you, if you take the trouble to read his books? In all that you have been saying I see — forgive me! — a ludicrous want of perspective and proportion. Why this craze for German books and German professors? Are there no thinkers in the world but German ones? And what is the whole history of German criticism but a history of brilliant failures, from Strauss downward? One theorist follows

another — now Mark is uppermost as the *Ur-Evangelist*, now Matthew — now the Synoptics are sacrificed to St. John, now St. John to the Synoptics. Baur relegates one after another of the Epistles to the second century because his theory cannot do with them in the first. Harnack tells you that Baur's theory is all wrong, and that Thessalonians and Philippians must go back again. Volkmar sweeps together Gospels and Epistles in a heap towards the middle of the second century as the earliest date for almost all of them; and Dr. Abbot, who, as we are told, has absorbed all the learning of all the Germans, puts Mark before 70 A.D., Matthew just about 70 A.D., and Luke about 80 A.D.! Strauss's mythical theory is dead and buried by common consent; Baur's tendency theory is much the same; Renan will have none of the Tübingen school; Volkmar is already antiquated; and Pfleiderer's fancies are now in the order of the day. Meanwhile, we who believe in a risen Lord look quietly on, while the "higher criticism" swallows its own offspring. When you have settled your own case, we say to your friends and teachers, then ask us to listen to you. Meanwhile we are practical men: the poor and wretched are at our gates, and sin, sorrow, death, stand aside for no one!'

Merriman had been watching his companion during this outburst with a curious expression, half combative, half indulgent. When Ronalds stopped, he took a long breath.

'I don't know whether you have read many of the books?' he asked shortly.

'No, I don't read German; and I am a busy parish clergyman with little time to spare for superfluities. But, as you remind me, S——'s lectures taught one a good deal, and I follow the matter in the press and the magazines, or in conversation, as I come across it.'

Merriman smiled.

'I suppose your answer would be the answer of four-fifths of English clergymen, if the question were put to them. Well, then I am to take it for granted, Ronalds, that to you the whole of German New Testament *Wissenschaft*, or at any rate, what calls itself "the German critical school," is practically indifferent. You regard it, in the words of a recent *Quarterly* article, as "an attack" which has "failed." Very well, let us leave the matter there for the present. Suppose we go to the Old Testament.

Were you at the Manchester Church Congress last year, and, if so, what was your impression?'

Ronalds leant forward, looked steadily into the fire, and did not answer for a moment or two. An expression of pain and perplexity gradually rose in the delicate face, in strong contrast with the inspiration, the confidence of his previous manner.

'You mean as to the Historical Criticism debate?'

Merriman nodded.

'It was extraordinarily interesting — very painful in some ways. I doubt the wisdom of it. It raised more questions than it solved. Since then I have had it much in my mind; but my life gives me no time to work at the subjects in detail.'

'Did it, or did it not, prove to your mind, as it did to mine, that there is a vital change going on, not only in the lay, but in the clerical conceptions of the Old Testament? Did your memory, like mine, travel back to Pusey, to the condemnation of Colenso by all the Bishops and five-sixths of Convocation, to the writers in the *Speaker's Commentary* who refuted him?'

'There is a change, certainly,' said Ronalds slowly; 'but' — and he raised his head with a light gesture, as of one shaking off a weight — 'my faith is not bound up with the religious books of the Jews — "God spake through the prophets," through Israel's training, through the Psalms — leave me that faith, which, indeed, in its broad essential elements, you have never yet been able to touch; give me the Gospels and St. Paul, and I at least am content.'

'"My faith is not bound up with the religious books of the Jews,"' repeated Merriman. 'I noticed almost a similar sentence in an article by the Bishop of Carlisle rather more than a year ago. What it means is that you and he have adopted, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, the standpoint of *Essays and Reviews*. He is a Bishop, you a High Churchman. Yet thirty years ago the Bishops and the High Churchmen prosecuted *Essays and Reviews* in two Ecclesiastical Courts; and Jowett's essay, in which the thoughts you have just expressed were practically embodied, cost him at Oxford his salary as professor. But to return to the Church Congress. The distinctive note of its most distinctive debate, as it seems to me, was the glorification of "criticism," especially, no doubt, in relation to the Old Testament. Turn to the passages. I have the report here' — and he drew the volume

towards him and turned up some marked pages. 'First, "I hold it to be established beyond all controversy that the Pentateuch in its present form was not written by Moses." That comes from the Dean of Peterborough. The same speaker says, further, "Of the composite character of the Hexateuch there can be no question. 'The proofs have been often set forth,' says Dr. Robertson Smith, 'and never answered.' To say that they have any connexion with rationalistic principles is simply to say that scholarship and rationalism are identical, for on this point Hebraists schools are agreed." — But if the Hexateuch be composite, a redaction of different documents from unknown hands, by an unknown editor, what becomes of its scriptural authority — what especially becomes of the doctrine of the Fall? — Poor Pusey! with his "amazement" that any mind could be shaken by such arguments as those contained in the first book of Colenso; or poor Wilberforce, with his contempt for the "old and often refuted cavils" brought forward by the assailants of the Pentateuch!

'But there is another passage a little further on in the Congress debate, which would have touched Pusey still more nearly. "The certainties already attained by criticism," cries Professor Cheyne triumphantly, "are neither few nor unimportant. Think of the Pentateuch, Isaiah, Daniel, and Ecclesiastes!" "*Think of Daniel!*" One can still hear Pusey thundering away: "Others who wrote in defence of the faith engaged in large subjects. I took for my province one more confined but definite issue. I selected the Book of Daniel. What I have proposed to myself in this course of lectures is to meet a boastful criticism upon its own grounds, and to show its failure where it claims to be most triumphant." "I have answered the objections raised," he declares; but he cannot "affect to believe that they have any special plausibility." What loftiness of tone all through! what a sternness of moral indignation towards the miserable sceptics, whose theories as to Daniel and the rest have been let loose, through *Essays and Reviews*, "on the young and uninstructed!" Well, five-and-twenty years go by, and the Church of England practically gives its verdict as between Pusey and the German or English infidels whom he trampled on, and, in spite of that tone of Apostolic certainty, judgement goes finally, even within the Church, not for the Anglican leader, but for the "infidels"! The Book of Daniel, despite a hesitating protest here and there, like that of Dr. Stan-

ley Leathes, or some bewildered country clergyman writing to the *Guardian*, comes quietly and irrevocably down to 165 B.C., and the Hexateuch, dissolved more or less into its original sources, announces itself as the peculiar product of that Jewish religious movement which, beginning under Josiah, strengthens with the Exile, and yields its final fruits long after the Exile! . . .

'But this whole debate is remarkable to a degree — *as a debate of a Church Congress*. It is penetrated and preoccupied with the claims of "criticism." Its subject is whether "critical *results*" (especially in connexion with the Old Testament) are to be taught from the pulpits of the Church of England, and these results as described by almost all the speakers involve a complete reconstruction of an English Churchman's ideas on the subject of the early history, laws, and religion of the Jews — matters which he has always regarded, and which, indeed, he logically must regard as intimately bound up with his Christian faith. Now all this, especially as one looks back twenty-five years, to the Synodical condemnation of Colenso, and of *Essays and Reviews*, strikes one as a sufficiently remarkable phenomenon. The question is, *What forces have brought it about?* Well, there can be very little debate as to that. No doubt science and Professor Huxley have had their way with the Mosaic cosmogony, and the methods and spirit of science provide an atmosphere which insensibly affects all our modes of thought. But we are passing out of the scientific phase of Old Testament criticism. That has, so to speak, done its work. It is the *literary and historical* phase which is now uppermost. And in the matter of the literary history of the Old Testament the present collapse of English orthodoxy is due to one cause, as far as I can see, and one cause only — *the invasion of English by German thought*. Instead of marching side by side with Germany and Holland during the last thirty years, as we might have done, had our theological faculties been other than what they are, we have been attacked and conquered by them; we have been skirmishing or protesting, feeding ourselves with the *Record* and the *Church Times*, reading the *Speaker's Commentary*, or the productions of the Christian Evidence Society, till the process of penetration from without has slowly completed itself, and we find ourselves suddenly face to face with such a fact as this Church Congress Debate, and the rise and marked success of a younger school of critics — Cheyne, Driver, Robert-

son Smith — whom the Germans may fairly regard as the captives of their bow and spear.

'For look at the names of scholars quoted in this very debate — all of them German, with the great exception of Kuenen! And look back over the history of the Pentateuchal controversy itself! It begins in Holland with Spinoza, or in France, with the oratorian Richard Simon, two hundred years ago. Simon starts the literary criticism of the Mosaic books, from the Catholic side. Jean le Clerc, a Dutch Protestant theologian in Amsterdam, about 1685, starts the historical method, inquires as to the time and circumstances of composition, and so on — first conceives it, in fact, as an historical problem. Seventy years later comes the Montpellier physician, Jean Astruc. He first notices the key to the whole enigma, the distinctive use made of the words "Elohim" and "Jahveh." This leads him to the supposition of different strata in the Pentateuch, and from him descend in direct line Kuenen and Wellhausen. — It is instructive, by the way, to notice that all the time Astruc will have nothing to say to arguments against the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. "That," he says scornfully, "was the disease of the last century" — an "attack," in fact, which had "failed"! — Well, then Astruc's *Conjectures* pass into Germany, and meet there at first with very much the same reception from German orthodoxy that English orthodoxy gave Colenso. Till Eichhorn's *Einleitung* appears. From that point the patient, industrious mind of Germany throws itself seriously on the problem, and a whole new and vast development begins. Thenceforward not a name of any importance that is not German, except that of Kuenen, who is altogether German in method and science, down to our own day, when at last amongst ourselves a school of English scholars trained in the German results, and enthusiastically eager to diffuse them, has risen to take away our reproach, and has hardly begun to work before the effects on English popular religion are everywhere conspicuous.

'Well, I don't know what you feel, Ronalds, but all these things to me, at any rate, are immensely significant. I say to myself, it has taken some thirty years for German critical science to conquer English opinion in the matter of the Old Testament. But, except in the regions of an either illiterate or mystical prejudice, that conquest is now complete. How much longer will it take before

we feel the victory of the same science, carried on by the same methods and with the same ends, in a field of knowledge infinitely more precious and vital to English popular religion than the field of the Old Testament — before Germany imposes upon us not only her conceptions with regard to the history and literature of the Jews, but also those which she has been elaborating for half a century with regard to that history which is the natural heir and successor of the Jewish — the history of Christian origins!'

'In your opinion, no doubt, a very few years indeed,' returned Ronalds, recovering that attractive cheerfulness of look which was characteristic of him. 'As for me, I see no necessary connexion between the two subjects. The period covered by the New Testament is much narrower, the material of a different quality, the evidence infinitely more accessible, the possibility of mistakes on the part of the Church infinitely less. And whatever may be said of our Old Testament scholarship, not even the most self-satisfied German can speak disrespectfully of us in the matter of the New. As I said before, with men like Lightfoot, Westcott, Hort, and Salmon as the leaders and champions of our faith on the intellectual side, we have very little, as it seems to me, to fear from any sceptical foreign *Wissenschaft*. Besides, what can be more unfair, Merriman, than to speak as if the whole of this *Wissenschaft* were on one side? Neander, Weiss, Dorner, Tischendorf, Luthardt; these are names as famous in the world as any of the so-called "critical" names, and they are the names, not of assailants, but of defenders of our faith. And as to the assault on the Christian documents, we can appeal not only to Christian writers but to a sceptic like Renan, in whose opinion the assault has been repulsed and discredited. No! here at least we are stronger, not weaker, than we were thirty years ago. Every weapon that a hostile science could suggest has been brought to bear against the tower of our faith, and it stands more victoriously than ever, foursquare to all the winds that blow.'

'And meanwhile every diocesan conference rings with the wail over "infidel opinions,"' said Merriman quietly. 'It grows notoriously more and more difficult to get educated men to take any interest in the services or doctrines of the Church, though they will join eagerly in its philanthropy; literature and the periodical press are becoming either more indifferent or more hostile to the

accepted Christianity year by year; the upper strata of the working class, upon whom the future of that class depends, either stand coldly aloof from all the Christian sects, or throw themselves into secularism; and Archdeacon Farrar, preaching on the prosecution of the Bishop of Lincoln, passionately appeals to all sections of Christians to close their ranks, not against each other, but against the "scepticism rampant" among the cultivated class, and the religious indifference of the democracy. — But let me take your points in order. No doubt there is a large and flourishing school of orthodox theology in Germany. So, seventy years ago, there was a large and flourishing school in Germany of defenders of the Mosaic authorship and date of the Pentateuch. One can run over the names — Fritzsche, Scheibel, Jahn, Dahler, Rosenmüller, Herz, Hug, Sack, Pustkuchen, Kanne, Meyer, Stäudlin — who now remembers one of them? Of all their books, says a French Protestant, sketching the controversy, *il n'est resté que le souvenir d'un héroïque et impuissant effort.* It is not *their* work, but that of their opponents, which has lived and penetrated, has transformed opinion and is moulding the future. They represented the exceptional, the traditional, the miraculous, and they have had to give way to the school representing the normal, the historical, the rational. And yet not one of them but did not believe that he had crushed De Wette and all his works! Is not all probability, all analogy, all the past, so to speak, on our side when we prophesy a like fate for those schools of the present which, in the field of Christian origins, represent the exceptional and the traditional, the miraculous? For what we have been witnessing so far is the triumph of a principle, of *an order of ideas*, and this principle, this order, belongs to us, not to you, and is as applicable to Christian history as it is to Jewish.

'Then as to our own theology. Let me be disrespectful to no one. But I should like to ask you what possibility is there in this country of a scientific, that is to say an unprejudiced, an unbiased study of theology, under present conditions? All our theological faculties are subordinate to the Church; the professors are clergymen, the examiners in the theological schools must be in priest's orders. They are, in fact, in that position to which the reactionary orthodoxy of Germany tried — unsuccessfully — to reduce the German universities after '48. Read the protest of the theological faculty of Göttingen against an attempt of the sort. It

is given, if I remember right, in Hausrath's *Life of Strauss*, and you will realise the opinion of learned Germany as to the effect of such a relation between the Church and the universities as obtains here, on the progress of knowledge. The results of our English system are precisely what you might expect — great industry, and great success in textual criticism, in all the branches of what the Germans call the *niedere Kritik;* complete sterility, as far as the higher criticism — that is to say the effort to reconceive Christianity in the light of the accumulations of modern knowledge — is concerned. When Pattison made his proposals as to the reorganisation of studies at Oxford, he did not trouble himself to include therein any proposals as to the theological faculty. Until the whole conditions under which that faculty exists could be altered, he knew that to meddle with it would be useless. All that could be expected from it was a certain amount of exegetical work and a more or less respectable crop of apologetic, and that it produced. But he did not leave the subject without drawing up a comparison between the opportunities of the theological student at Oxford and those of the same student at any German university — a comparison which set one thinking. His complaints of the quality and range of English theological research have been often repeated; they were echoed at last year's Church Congress by Professor Cheyne — but, in fact, the matter is notorious. You have only to glance from the English field to the German, from our own cramped conditions and meagre product to the German abundance and variety, to appreciate Pattison's remark in the *Westminster*, in 1857. I forget the exact words — "it is a misnomer to speak of *German* theology. It is more properly the theology of the age" — the only scientific treatment of the materials which exists. Like other great movements, it rises in this country or that, but it ends by penetrating into all. For my own part I believe that we in England, with regard to this German study of Christianity, are now at the beginning of an epoch of *popularisation*. The books which record it have been studied in England, Scotland, and America with increasing eagerness during the last fifteen years by a small class; in the next fifteen years we shall probably see their contents reproduced in English form and penetrating public opinion in a new and surprising way. A minimum of readers among us read German, and translations only affect a small and mostly profes-

sional stratum of opinion. But when we get our own English lives of Christ and histories of the primitive Church, written on German principles in the tone and speech familiar to the English world, then will come the struggle. With regard to the Old Testament, this is precisely what has happened — the struggle has come — and already we see much of the result.

'Finally as to Renan' — Merriman lay back in his chair, and a smile broadened over the whole face — 'I am always puzzled by the readiness with which the Englishman uses Renan as a stick to beat the Germans. Forgive me, Ronalds — but does n't it sometimes occur to you that the Germans may have something to say about Renan? Is n't their whole contention about him that he is a great artist, a brilliant historian, but an uncertain critic? Amiel, who, though a Genevese, was brought up at Berlin, exactly expresses German opinion when he lays stress on the contradiction in Renan "between the literary taste of the artist, which is delicate, individual, and true, and the opinions of the critic, which are borrowed, old-fashioned, and wavering." In the course of time this judgement becomes patent to Renan, and the result appears in certain uncivil passages about young German professors in the preface to *Les Evangiles* and elsewhere. What matter? The face of knowledge remains the same. Renan is still, as Taine long ago remarked, the main expounder of German theological *Wissenschaft* for the world in general; in spite of his own great learning, the *Origines du Christianisme* could not have been written without the thirty years of German labour lying behind it. And, as a principle — whether it is a great Frenchman determined to combine the artist with the *savant*, or an Englishman struggling to fuse Anglicanism with learning, as soon as it comes to serious differences between them and the German critical schools, I can only say that the impartial historical spectator will be all for the chances of the Germans, simply from his knowledge of the general lie of the field! Oh, these Germans!' — the speaker shook his head with an expression half humorous, half protesting — '"Yes, we arraign them," and justly, for their type and their style, their manners or no-manners, their dulness and their length. And all the time, what Taine said long ago in his study of Carlyle remains as true as ever. Let me turn to the passage, I have pondered it often,' and he drew a little note-book to him, which was lying beside his hand.

'"Thus at the end of the last century there rose into being the philosophic genius of Germany, which, after engendering a new metaphysic, a new theology, a new poetry, a new literature, a new philology, a new exegesis, a new learning, is now descending into all the sciences, and there carrying on its evolution. No spirit more original, more universal, more fruitful in consequences of all sorts, more capable of transforming everything and remaking everything, has shown itself in the world for three hundred years. It is of the same significance, the same rank, as that of the Renaissance and that of the Classical Period. Like those earlier forces, it draws to itself all the best endeavour of contemporary intelligence, it appears as they did in every civilised country, it represents as they did *un des moments de l'histoire du monde.*"'

The enthusiast dropped the book, with a smile at his own warmth. Ronalds smiled too, but more sadly, and the two friends sat silent a while. Merriman refilled his pipe, his keen look showing the rise within him of thoughts as quick and numerous as the spirals of blue smoke which presently came and went between him and his friend.

After a minute or two he said, bending forward: —

'But all that, Ronalds, was by the way. Let me go back to myself and this change of view I am trying to explain to you. You have given me your opinion, which I suppose is a very common one among English Churchmen, that the whole movement of German critical theology is an "attack" which has "failed," that the orthodox position is really stronger than before it began, and so on. Well, let me put side by side with that conviction of yours, my own, which has been gained during eighteen months' intense effort, spent all of it on German soil, in the struggle to understand something of the past history and the present situation of German critical theology. Take it from 1835, fifty-three years. — Practically the movement which matters to us begins with the shock and scandal of Strauss's *Leben Jesu*, which appeared in that year. Strauss, who like Renan was an artist and a writer, derived, as we all know, his philosophical impulse from Hegel, his critical impulse from Schleiermacher. Philosophically he appealed from Hegel the orthodox conservative, to Hegel the thinker. "You taught us," he says in effect to his great teacher, "that there are two elements in all religion, the passing and the

eternal, the relative and the absolute, the *Vorstellung* and the *Begriff*. The particular system of dogmas put forward by any religion is the *Vorstellung*, or presentation, the *Begriff*, or idea, is the underlying spiritual reality common to it and presumably other systems besides. Why in Christianity have you gone so far towards identifying the two? Why this exception? for what reasons have you allowed to the *Vorstellung* in Christianity a value which belongs only to the *Begriff?* Your reasons must rest upon the Christian evidence. But the evidence cannot bear the weight. Examine it carefully and you will see that the particular statements which it makes are really only *Vorstellung* as in other religions, the imaginative mythical elements which hide from us the Idea, or *Begriff*. The idea which is expressed in Christian theology is the idea of God in man. The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus are shadows of the eternal generation, the endless self-repetition of the Divine life. The single facts are mere sensuous symbols. 'To the idea in the fact, to the race in the individual, our age wishes to be led.' Naturally to achieve this end the Gospels as history had to be swept away. And they were remorselessly swept away. Something indeed remained. There was a Jewish teacher, Jesus of Nazareth, in whom contemporary faith saw first the Messiah, then the Son of God, then the Logos. But his life and character were comparatively unimportant (so it stood, at least, in the earliest *Leben Jesu*); what was important was the idealising mythopœic faculty which from the Jesus of the Galilean Lake evolved the Christ of Bethlehem, of the miracles, of the Resurrection, of theology." Thus the whole method was speculative and *a priori*. There was in it a minimum of history, a minimum indeed of literary criticism. Strauss criticised the *contents* of the Christian literature without understanding the literary and historical conditions which had produced it. Of the real life and culture of the men who wrote it, of the real historical conditions surrounding the person of Jesus, he had almost as little notion as the dogmatic historians who undertook to answer him.

'Luckily, however, not only orthodoxy, but the spirit of history, took alarm, and from the revolt of history against hypothesis began the Tübingen school. Baur, that veteran of knowledge, was struck, in the first place, with the fact that Strauss's book revealed, that a scientific knowledge of Christian sources was as

yet wanting to theology; in the next he was imbued with the conception that the Gospels had been till then placed in a false perspective both by Strauss and New Testament criticism generally — that not they, but the Pauline Epistles, represent the earliest and directest testimony we have to Christian belief. From this standpoint he began a complete re-examination of early Christian literature, conceiving it as a chapter in the history of thought. How did the circle of disciples surrounding Jesus of Nazareth broaden into the Catholic Church? Can the steps of that development be traced in the books of the New Testament? If so, how are the separate books to be classed and interpreted with relation to the general movement? We all know the famous answer, — that the Catholic Church of the second century is but the product of a great compromise come to under the pressure of heresy by the two primitive opposing parties, the Petrine and the Pauline, which for about a hundred years had divided Christian literature between them, so that all its products, Gospels, Epistles, and Apocalypse, are, in a sense, pamphlets, controversial documents written in the interests of one or the other body of opinion. Well, here at last was history — as compared either with Strauss's philosophising, or with the idyllic but unintelligible picture presented by the Early Church as it was drawn, say, by Neander. But it was not yet *pure history*. It was marred by a too great love of system-making, of arbitrary antitheses and formulæ, learnt, of course, from Hegel, which took far too little account of the variety, the *nuances*, the complexity and many-sidedness which belonged to the early Christian life, as to all life, but especially the rich and fermenting life of a nascent religion. The clue was found, but in spite of the genius of Baur — and to my mind we owe to him all that we really *know* at the present moment about the New Testament — it had been too arbitrarily and confidently followed up.

'Again history protested, and again critical theology fell patiently to work.

'It was conscious of two wants — a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the personality and work of Jesus, which Baur, who had thrown a flood of light on Paul, had notoriously left unattempted; and in the second place, it was striving towards a more lifelike and convincing picture of the early Christian society. From a study of Christian ideas, it fell to a

closer study of the conditions under which they arose, of that whole culture, social and intellectual, Jewish or Hellenic, of which they were presumably the product. Collateral knowledge poured in on all sides — of the history of religions, of Roman institutions, of the developments and ramifications of Hellenic and Hellenistic thought. The workers following Baur fell into different groups: Hilgenfeld on the right, softening and moderating Baur's more negative conclusions; Volkmar on the left, developing them extravagantly, yet evolving in the process an amount of learning, ingenuity, and suggestiveness which will leave its mark when his specific conclusions as to the dates of the New Testament books have been forgotten. Meanwhile two oppositions to the Tübingen school had shown themselves — the dogmatic and the scientific. Of the first not much need be said. Its most honoured name is that of Bernhard Weiss, but the great majority of its books, written to meet the orthodox needs of the moment, are already forgotten. On the other hand, the scientific opposition represented by Reuss, Rothe, Ewald, and Ritschl did admirable work. It brought Baur's ideas to the test in every possible way, and it supplied fresh ideas, fresh solutions of its own. Reuss's cautious and exhaustive method led the student to think out the whole problem for himself anew; Rothe drew out the debt of Christianity to Greek and Latin institutions; while Ritschl tracked out shades and *nuances* in early Christianity which Baur's over-logical method had missed.

'The years went on. With each the spirit of the time became more historical, more concrete. The forces generated by the great German historical school, by Ranke, and Mommsen, and Waitz, and by the offshoots of this school in France and England, made themselves felt more and more on theological ground. A new series of biographies of Jesus began. Strauss, after an abstinence of twenty years from theology, issued a new edition of the *Leben Jesu*, largely modified by concessions to a more historical and positive spirit. Schenkel published his *Charakterbild Jesu*, by which, in spite of what we should call its Broad Church orthodoxy, German clerical opinion was almost as violently exercised as it had been by Strauss thirty years before. Keim began his most interesting, most important, and most imperfect book, *Jesus von Nazara*, and beyond the frontier Renan brought the results of two generations' labour within the reach of the whole

educated world by the historical brilliance and acumen thrown into the successive volumes of the *Origines*. In all this a generation has passed away since Baur died, and we are brought again to a point where we can provisionally strike a balance of results. Do you remember Harnack's article on the present state of critical theology in the *Contemporary* two years or more ago? Harnack is a man of great ability and extraordinary industry, largely read in Germany and beginning to be largely read here. Well — as compared with the state of knowledge thirty years ago, when the Tübingen school was at its height, his verdict on the knowledge of to-day is simply this — "*richer in historical points of view.*" Harnack himself has carried opposition to some of the most characteristic Tübingen conclusions almost to extravagance; but here in this careful and fair-minded summary not a word of disrespect to a famous school and "a great master," not a word of an "attack" which has "failed." Because the person who is speaking knows better! Yet he draws with a firm hand the positive advances, the altered aspects of knowledge. Why have we come to know more of that problem of the rise of Catholicism to which Baur devoted his life than Baur could ever know? Simply because "we have grown more realistic, more elastic, the historical temper has developed, we have acquired the power of transplanting ourselves into other times. Great historians — men like Ranke — have taught us this. Then we have realised that all history is one, that religion and church history is a mere section of the whole history of a period, and cannot be understood except in relation to that whole." And so on. My whole experience in Germany was an illustration of these words. As compared with my Oxford divinity training, it was like passing from a world of shadows to a world of living and breathing humanity. Each of my three professors on his own ground was grappling with the secret of the past, drawing it out with the spells of learning, sympathy, and imagination, working all the while perfectly freely, unhampered by subscription or articles, or the requirements of examinations. Our own theology can show nothing like it; the most elementary conditions of such work are lacking among us; it will take the effort of a generation to provide them.

'Two books in particular occur to me — if you are not weary of my disquisition! — as representing this most recent phase of development; Schürer's *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeit-*

*alter Jesu Christi*, and Hausrath's *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte*. In the first you have a minute study of all the social and intellectual elements in the life of Judæa and Judaism generally, at the time of the appearance of Christianity. In the second you have the same materials, only handled in a more consecutive and artistic way, and as a setting first for the life of Jesus, and afterwards for the history of the Apostles. If you compare them with Strauss, you see with startling clearness how far we have travelled in half a century. *There* an empty background, an effaced personality, and in its stead the play of philosophical abstraction. *Here*, a landscape of extraordinary detail and realism, peopled with the town and country populations which belong to it; Pharisee and Essene, Sadducee and Hellenist, standing out with the dress and utterance and gesture native to each; and in their midst the figure which is at last becoming real, intelligible, human, as it has never yet been, and which in these latter days we are beginning again to see with something of the vision of those who first loved and obeyed! — The contrast sets us looking back with wonder over the long, long road. But there is no break in it, no serious deviation. From the beginning till now the driving impulse has been the same — the impulse to *understand*, the yearning towards a unified and rationalised knowledge. Each step has been necessary, and each step a development. A diluted and falsified history was first driven out by thought, which was then, as it were, left alone for a time on ground cleared by violence; now a juster thought has replaced the old losses by a truer history, a fuller and exacter range of conceptions. — An "*attack*" which has "*failed*." — Could any description be more ludicrous than this common English label applied to a great and so far triumphant movement of thought? Looking back over the controversy, whether as to the Old Testament or the New, I see a similar orthodox judgement asserting itself again and again — generally as an immediate prelude to some fresh and imposing development of the critical process — and again and again routed by events. At the present moment it could only arise, like your quotation of Renan, if you will let me say so — and I mean no offence — in a country and amid minds for the most part willingly ignorant of the whole actual situation. Just as much as the criticism of Roman institutions and primitive Roman history has failed, just as much as the scientific investigation of Buddhism during the present century

has failed, in the same degree has the critical investigation of Christianity failed — no more! In all three fields there has been the same alternation of hypothesis and verification, of speculative thought modified by controlling fact. But because some of Niebuhr's views as to the trustworthiness of Livy have been corrected here and there in a more conservative sense by his successors — because Sénart's speculations as to the mythical elements of Buddhism have been checked in certain directions by the conviction of a later school that from the Pâli texts now being brought to light a greater substratum of fact may be recovered for the life of Buddha and the primitive history of his order than was at one time suspected, — because of these fluctuations of scholarship, you do not point a hasty finger of scorn at the modern studies of Roman history or of Buddhism! Still less, I imagine, are you prepared to go back to an implicit belief in Rhea Sylvia, or to find the miracles of early Buddhism more historically convincing!'

Ronalds looked up quickly. 'We do not admit your parallel for a moment! In the first place, the Christian phenomena are unique in the history of the world, and cannot be profitably compared on equal terms with any other series of phenomena. In the second, the variations which do not substantially affect the credit of scholarship in matters stretching so far over time and place as Roman history or Buddhism, are of vital consequence when it comes to Christianity. The period is so much narrower, the possibilities so much more limited. To throw back the Gospels from the second century, where Baur and Volkmar placed them, to the last thirty years of the first is practically to surrender the bases of the rationalist theory. You give yourself no time for the play of legend, and instead of idealising followers writing mythical and hearsay accounts, the critic himself brings us back face to face with either eye-witnesses, or at any rate the reporters of eye-witnesses. He has treated the testimony as he pleased, has subjected it to every harsh irreverent test his ingenuity could suggest, and instead of either getting rid of it wholesale, or forcing it into the mould of his own arbitrary conceptions, he is obliged to put up with it, to acknowledge in it a power he cannot pass over — the witness of truth to the living truth!'

'"Obliged to put up with it"!' said Merriman, with a smile, in which, however, there was a touch of deep melancholy. 'How

oddly such a phrase describes that patient loving investigation of every vestige and fragment of Christian antiquity which has been the work of the critical school, and to which the orthodox Church, little as she will acknowledge it, owes all the greater reasonableness and livingness of her own modern Christianity! On the contrary, Ronalds, men like Harnack and Hausrath have no quarrel with Christian testimony, no antipathy whatever to what it has to say. They have simply by long labour come to *understand* it, to be able to *translate* it. They, and a vast section of the thinking Christian world with them, have merely learnt not to ask of that testimony more than it can give. They have come to recognise that it was conditioned by certain necessities of culture, certain laws of thought; that in a time which had no conception of history, or of accurate historical reporting in our sense — a time which produced the allegorical interpretations of Alexandria, the Rabbinical interpretations of St. Paul and the Gospels, the historical method of Josephus, the superstitions of Justin and Papias, the childish criticism and information of Irenæus, and the mass of pseudepigraphical literature which meet us at every turn before, and in, and after the New Testament — it is useless to expect to find a history which is not largely legend, a tradition which is not largely delusion. Led by experience gathered not only from Christian history, but from all history, they expect beforehand what the Christian documents reveal. They see a sense of history so weak that, in preserving the tradition of the Lord, it cannot keep clear and free from a manifest contradiction even the most essential facts, not even the native place of his parents, the duration of his ministry, the date of his death, the place and time and order of the Resurrection appearances, the length of the mysterious period intervening between the Resurrection and the Ascension; and in preserving the tradition of the Apostles, it cannot record with certainty for their disciples even the most essential facts as to their later lives, the scenes of their labours, the manner of their deaths. On all these points the documents show naïvely — as all early traditions do — the most irreconcileable discrepancies. The critical historian could have foretold them, finds them the most natural thing in the world. On the other hand, he grows familiar, as the inquiry goes deeper, with that fund of fancy and speculation, of superstitious belief, or nationalist hope in the mind of the first Christian

period, the bulk of which he knows to be much older than the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth, and wherein he can trace the elements which conditioned the activity of the Master, and coloured all the thoughts of his primitive followers about him. He measures the strength of these fantastic or poetical conceptions of nature and history by the absence or weakness, in the society producing them, of that controlling logical and scientific instinct which it has been the work of succeeding centuries, the toil of later generations, to develop in mankind; and when he sees the passion of the Messianic hope, or the Persian and Parsee conceptions of an unseen world which the course of history had grafted on Judaism, or the Hellenistic speculation with which the Jewish Dispersion was everywhere penetrated, or the mere natural love of marvel which every populace possesses, and more especially an Eastern populace — when he watches these forces either shaping the consciousness of Jesus, or dictating the forms of belief and legend and dogma in which his followers cast the love and loyalty roused by a great personality — this also he could have foretold, this also is the most natural thing in the world. For to realise the necessity, the inevitableness of these three features in the story of Christianity, he has only to look out on the general history of religions, of miracle, of sacred biography, of inspired books, to see the same forces and the same processes repeating themselves all over the religious field.

'So in the same way with the penetration and success of Christianity, — the "moral miracle," which is to convince us of Christian dogma, when the appeal to physical miracle fails. To the historian there is no miracle, moral or physical, in the matter, any more than there is in the rise of Buddhism or of any other of those vast religious systems with which the soil of history is strewn. He sees the fuel of a great ethical and spiritual movement, long in preparation from many sides, kindled into flame by that spark of a great personality, — a life of genius, a tragic death. He sees the movement shaping itself to the poetry, myth, and philosophy already existing when it began, he sees it producing a new literature, instinct with a new passion, simplicity and feeling. He watches it as time goes on appropriating the strength of Roman institutions, the subtleties of Greek thought, and although in every religious history, nay, in every individual history, there remain puzzles and complexities which belong to the

mysteries of the human organisation, and which no critical process however sympathetic can ever completely fathom, still at the end the Christian problem is nearer a detailed solution for him than some others of the great religious problems of the world. How much harder for a European really to understand the vast spread and empire of Buddhism, its first rise, its tenacious hold on human life!

'But this relatively full understanding of the Christian problem is only reached *by a vigilant maintenance of that lookout over the whole religious field* of which I spoke just now. Only so can the historian keep his instinct sharp, his judgement clear. It is this constant use indeed of the comparative method which distinguishes him from the orthodox critic, which divides, say a German like Harnack or Hausrath from an Englishman like Westcott. The German is perpetually bringing into connexion and relation; the Englishman, like Westcott, on the contrary, under the influence of Mansel's doctrine of "affection," works throughout from an isolation, from the perpetual assumption of a special case. The first method is throughout scientific. The second has nothing to do with science. It has its own justification, no doubt, but it must not assume a name that does not belong to it.'

'Now I see, Merriman, how little you really understand the literature you profess to judge!' cried Ronalds; 'as if Westcott, who knows everything, and is for ever bringing Christianity into relation with the forces about it, can be accused of isolating it! A passage from the *Gospel of the Resurrection* comes into my mind at the moment which is conclusive: "Christianity is not an isolated system, but the result of a long preparation — Christianity cannot be regarded alone and isolated from its antecedents. To attempt to separate Christianity from Judaism and Hellenism is not to interpret Christianity, but to construct a new religion," and so on. What can be more clear?'

'I speak from a knowledge of Westcott's books,' said Merriman quietly. 'The passages you quote concern the moral and philosophical phenomena of Christianity — I was speaking of the miraculous phenomena. No scholar of any eminence, whatever might have been the case fifty years ago, could at the present moment discuss the speculation and ethics of early Christendom without reference to surrounding conditions. So much the

progress of knowledge has made impossible. But the procedure the Christian apologist cannot maintain in the field of ideas, he still maintains in the field of miracle and event. Do you find Westcott seriously sifting and comparing the narratives of healing, of rising from the dead, of visions, and so on, which meet us in the New Testament, by the help of narratives of a similar kind to be found either in contemporary or later documents, of the materials offered by the history of other religions or of other periods of Christianity? And if the attempt is anywhere made, do you not feel all through that it is unreal, that the speaker's mind is made up, to begin with, under the influence of "that affection which is part of insight," and that he starts his history from an assumption which has nothing to do with history? No! Westcott is an eclectic, or a schoolman, of the most delicate, interesting, and attractive type possible; but his great learning is for him not an instrument and means of conviction, it is a mere adornment of it.'

There was a long pause, which Ronalds at last broke, looking at his friend with emotion in every feature.

'And the result of it all, Merriman, for Germany and for yourself? Is Germany the better or the nobler for all her speculation? Are you the happier?'

Merriman thought a while as he stood leaning over the fire; then he said, 'Germany is in a religious state very difficult to understand, and the future of which is very difficult to forecast. To my mind, the chief evils of it come from that fierce reaction after '48 which prevented the convictions of liberal theology from mingling with the life and institutions of the people. Religion was for years made a question of politics and bureaucracy; and though the freedom of teaching was never seriously interfered with, the Church, which was for a long time the tool of political conservatism, organised itself against the liberal theological faculties, and the result has been a divorce between common life and speculative belief which affects the greater part of the cultivated class. The destructive forces of scientific theology have made them indifferent to dogma and formulæ, and reaction in Church and State has made it impossible for the new spiritual conceptions which belong to that theology to find new forms of religious action and expression.'

'*Religious* action!' said Ronalds bitterly. 'What religion is

possible to men who regard Christ as a good man with mistaken notions on many points, and God as an open question?'

'For me at the present moment,' replied Merriman, with a singular gentleness, and showing in the whole expression of eye and feature, as he involuntarily moved nearer to his companion, a wish to soothe pain, a yearning to meet feeling with feeling, 'that is not the point. The point is, what religion is possible to men, for whom God is the only reality, and Jesus that friend of God and man, in whom, through all human and necessary imperfection, they see the natural leader of their inmost life, the symbol of those religious forces in man which are primitive, essential, and universal?'

'What can a mere man, however good and eminent, matter to me,' asked Ronalds impatiently, 'eighteen centuries after his death? The idea that Christianity can be reconstructed on any such basis is the merest dream.'

'Then, if so, history is realising a dream! For while you and those who think with you, Ronalds, are discussing whether a certain combination is possible, that combination is slowly and silently establishing itself in human life all about you! You dispute and debate — *solvitur ambulando.* All over the world, in quiet German towns, in Holland, in the circles which represent some of the best life of France, in large sections of Scotch and English life, and in large sections of American life, these ideas which you ridicule as chimerical are being carried day by day into action, tried by all the tests which evil and pain can apply, and proving their power to help, inspire, and console human beings. All round us' — and the speaker drew himself up, an indescribable air of energy and hope pervading look and frame —'all round us I feel the New Reformation preparing, struggling into utterance and being! It is the product, the compromise of two forces, the scientific and the religious. In the English Reformed Church of the future, to which the Church of England and the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists, the Independents, and the Unitarians will all contribute, and wherein the Liberal forces now rising in each body will ultimately coalesce, science will find the religion with which, as it has long since declared, through its wisest mouths, it has no rightful quarrel, and religion will find the science which belongs to it and which it needs. Ah! but when, *when?*' — and the tone

changed to one of yearning and passion. 'It is close upon us — it is prepared by all the forces of history and mind — its rise sooner or later is inevitable. But one has but the one life, and the years go by. Meanwhile the men whose hearts and heads are with us, who are our natural leaders, cling to systems which are for others, not for them, in which their faith is gone, and where their power is wasted, preaching a two-fold doctrine — one for the *élite* and one for the multitude — and so ignoring all the teachings of history as to the sources and conditions of the religious life.'

He stopped, a deep momentary depression stealing over the face and attitude, which ten minutes before had expressed such illimitable hope. Again Ronalds put up his hand and laid it lingeringly on the arm beside him.

'And yourself, Merriman?'

Merriman looked down into the anxious friendly eyes, the moved countenance, and his own aspect gradually cleared. He spoke with a grave and mild solemnity as though making a confession of faith.

'I am content, Ronalds, — inwardly more at rest than for years. This study of mine, which at first seemed to have swept away all, has given me back much. God — though I can find no names for Him — is more real, more present to me than ever before. And when, in the intervals of my law-work, I go back to my favourite books, it seems to me that I live with Jesus, beside Gennesareth, or in the streets of Jerusalem, as I never lived with him in the old days, when you and I were Anglicans together. I realise his historical limitations, and the more present they are to me, the more my heart turns to him, the more he means to me, and the more ready I am to go out into that world of the poor and helpless he lost his life for, with the thought of him warm within me. I do not put him alone, on any non-natural pinnacle; but history, led by the blind and yet Divine instinct of the race, has lifted this life from the mass of lives, and in it we Europeans see certain ethical and spiritual essentials concentrated and embodied, as we see the essentials of poetry and art and knowledge concentrated and embodied in other lives. And because ethical and spiritual things are more vital to us than art and knowledge, this life is more vital to us than those. Many others *may* have possessed the qualities of Jesus, or of Buddha,

but circumstance and history have in each case decided as to the relative worth of the particular story, the particular inspiration, for the world in which it arose, in comparison with other stories or other inspirations; and amid the difficulties of existence, the modern European who persists in ignoring the practical value of this exquisite Christian inheritance of ours, or the Buddhist who should as yet look outside his own faith for the materials of a more rational religious development, is to my mind merely wasteful and impatient. We must submit to the education of God — the revolt against miraculous belief is becoming now not so much a revolt of reason as a revolt of conscience and faith — but we must keep firm hold all the while of that vast heritage of feeling which goes back, after all, through all the overgrowths of dream and speculation to that strongest of all the forces of human life — the love of man for man, the trust of the lower soul in the higher, the hope and the faith which the leader and the hero kindles amid the masses!'

The two men remained silent a while. Then Ronalds rose from his chair and grasped his companion's hand.

'We are nearer than we seemed half an hour ago,' he said.

'And we shall come nearer yet,' said Merriman, smiling.

Ronalds shook his head, stayed chatting a while on indifferent subjects, and went.

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